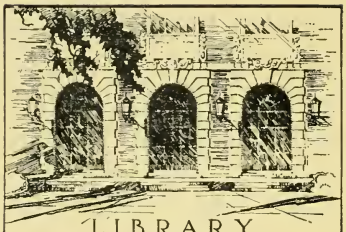

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WE TWO

A NOVEL

BY

EDNA LYALL

AUTHOR OF "DONOVAN," ETC.

"Men are so made as to resent nothing more impatiently than to be treated as criminal for opinions which they deem true."—SPINOZA.

"We two are a multitude."—OVID.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1884.

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PRO CON.

In Memoriam.

1871—1884.

"Knowledge by suffering entereth."

WE TWO.

CHAPTER I.

BRIAN FALLS IN LOVE.

Still humanity grows dearer,
Being learned the more.

JEAN INGELOW.

There are three things in this world which deserve no quarter—Hypocrisy, Pharisaism, and Tyranny.

F. ROBERTSON.

PEOPLE who have been brought up in the country, or in small places where every neighbour is known by sight, are apt to think that life in a large town must lack many of the interests which they have learned to find in their more limited communities. In a some-

what bewildered way, they gaze at the shifting crowd of strange faces, and wonder whether it would be possible to feel completely at home where all the surroundings of life seem ever changing and unfamiliar.

But those who have lived long in one quarter of London, or of any other large town, know that there are in reality almost as many links between the actors of the town life-drama as between those of the country life-drama.

Silent recognitions pass between passengers who meet day after day in the same morning or evening train, on the way to or from work; the faces of omnibus conductors grow familiar; we learn to know perfectly well on what day of the week and at what hour the well-known organ-grinder will make his appearance, and in what street we shall meet the city clerk or the care-worn little daily governess on their way to office or school.

It so happened that Brian Osmond, a young doctor who had not been very long settled in the Bloomsbury regions, had an engagement which took him every afternoon down Gower

Street, and here many faces had grown familiar to him. He invariably met the same sallow-faced postman, the same nasal-voiced milkman, the same pompous-looking man with the bushy whiskers and the shiny black bag, on his way home from the city. But the only passenger in whom he took any interest was a certain bright-faced little girl whom he generally met just before the Montague Place crossing. He always called her his 'little girl,' though she was by no means little in the ordinary acceptation of the word, being at least sixteen, and rather tall for her years. But there was a sort of freshness and *naïveté* and youthfulness about her which made him use that adjective. She usually carried a pile of books in a strap, so he conjectured that she must be coming from school, and, ever since he had first seen her, she had worn the same rough blue serge dress, and the same quaint little fur hat. In other details however, he could never tell in the least how he should find her. She seemed to have a mood for every day. Sometimes she would be in a great hurry and

would almost run past him; sometimes she would saunter along in the most unconventional way, glancing from time to time at a book or a paper; sometimes her eager face would look absolutely bewitching in its brightness; sometimes scarcely less bewitching in a consuming anxiety which seemed unnatural in one so young.

One rainy afternoon in November, Brian was as usual making his way down Gower Street, his umbrella held low to shelter him from the driving rain which seemed to come in all directions. The milkman's shrill voice was still far in the distance, the man of letters was still at work upon knockers some way off, it was not yet time for his little girl to make her appearance, and he was not even thinking of her, when suddenly his umbrella was nearly knocked out of his hand by coming violently into collision with another umbrella. Brought thus to a sudden stand, he looked to see who it was who had charged him with such violence, and found himself face to face with his unknown friend. He had never been quite so close to

her before. Her quaint face had always fascinated him, but on nearer view he thought it the loveliest face he had ever seen—it took his heart by storm.

It was framed in soft, silky masses of dusky auburn hair which hung over the broad white forehead, but at the back was scarcely longer than a boy's. The features, though not regular, were delicate and piquant, the usual faint rose-flush on the cheeks deepened now to carnation, perhaps because of the slight *contretemps*, perhaps because of some deeper emotion—Brian fancied the latter, for the clear, golden-brown eyes that were lifted to his seemed bright either with indignation or with unshed tears. To-day it was clear that the mood was not a happy one : his little girl was in trouble.

'I am very sorry,' she said, looking up at him, and speaking in a low, musical voice, but with the unembarrassed frankness of a child. 'I really wasn't thinking or looking, it was very careless of me.'

Brian of course took all the blame to himself, and apologised profusely ; but though he

would have given much to detain her, if only for a moment, she gave him no opportunity, but with a slight inclination passed rapidly on. He stood quite still, watching her till she was out of sight, aware of a sudden change in his life. He was a busy, hard-working man, not at all given to dreams, and it was no dream that he was in now. He knew perfectly well that he had met his ideal, had spoken to her and she to him; that somehow in a single moment a new world had opened out to him. For the first time in his life he had fallen in love.

The trifling occurrence had made no great impression on the 'little girl' herself. She was rather vexed with herself for the carelessness, but a much deeper trouble was filling her heart. She soon forgot the passing interruption and the brown-bearded man with the pleasant grey eyes who had apologised for what was quite her fault. Something had gone wrong that day, as Brian had surmised; the eyes grew brighter, the carnation flush deepened as she hurried along, the delicate lips closed with a

curiously hard expression, the hands were clasped with unnecessary tightness round the umbrella and the handle of the book-strap.

She passed up Guilford Square, but did not turn into any of the old decayed houses; her home was far less imposing. At the corner of the square there is a narrow opening which leads into a sort of blind alley paved with grim flag-stones. Here, facing a high blank wall, are four or five very dreary houses. She entered one of these, put down her wet umbrella in the shabby little hall, and opened the door of a barely-furnished room, the walls of which were, however, lined with books. Beside the fire was the one really comfortable piece of furniture in the room, an Ilkley couch, and upon it lay a very wan-looking invalid, who, as the door opened, glanced up with a smile of welcome.

'Why, Erica, you are home early to-day. How is that?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Erica, tossing down her books in a way which showed her mother that she was troubled about something. 'I

suppose I tore along at a good rate, and there was no temptation to stay at the High School.'

'Come and tell me about it,' said the mother, gently, 'what has gone wrong, little one?'

'Everything!' exclaimed Erica, vehemently. 'Everything always does go wrong with us and always will, I suppose. I wish you had never sent me to school, mother; I wish I need never see the place again!'

'But till to-day you enjoyed it so much.'

'Yes, the classes and the being with Gertrude. But that will never be the same again. It's just this, mother, I'm never to speak to Gertrude again—to have nothing more to do with her.'

'Who said so? And why?'

'Why? Because I'm myself,' said Erica, with a bitter little laugh. 'How I can help it, nobody seems to think. But Gertrude's father has come back from Africa and was horrified to learn that we were friends, made her promise never to speak to me again, and made her write this note about it. Look!'

and she took a crumpled envelope from her pocket.

The mother read the note in silence, and an expression of pain came over her face. Erica, who was very impetuous, snatched it away from her when she saw that look of sadness.

'Don't read the horrid thing!' she exclaimed, crushing it up in her hand. 'There, we will burn it!' and she threw it into the fire with a vehemence which somehow relieved her.

'You shouldn't have done that,' said her mother. 'Your father will be sure to want to see it.'

'No, no, no,' cried Erica, passionately. 'He must not know, you must not tell him, mother.'

'Dear child, have you not learnt that it is impossible to keep anything from him! He will find out directly that something is wrong.'

'It will grieve him so, he must not hear it,' said Erica. 'He cares so much for what hurts us. Oh, why are people so hard and cruel? Why do they treat us like lepers? It isn't all because of losing Gertrude—I could bear that if there were some real reason, if she went away

or died. But there's no reason! It's all prejudice and bigotry and injustice—it's that which makes it sting so.'

Erica was not at all given to tears, but there was now a sort of choking in her throat, and a sort of dimness in her eyes, which made her rather hurriedly settle down on the floor in her own particular nook beside her mother's couch, where her face could not be seen. There was a silence. Presently the mother spoke, stroking back the wavy, auburn hair with her thin white hand.

'For a long time I have dreaded this for you, Erica. I was afraid you didn't realise the sort of position the world will give you. Till lately you have seen scarcely any but our own people, but it can hardly be, darling, that you can go on much longer without coming into contact with others, and then, more and more, you must realise that you are cut off from much that other girls may enjoy.'

'Why?' questioned Erica, 'why can't they be friendly? Why must they cut us off from everything?'

'It does seem unjust, but you must remember that we belong to an unpopular minority.'

'But if I belonged to the larger party I would at least be just to the smaller,' said Erica. 'How can they expect us to think their system beautiful when the very first thing they show us is hatred and meanness. Oh, if I belonged to the other side I would show them how different it might be.'

'I believe you would,' said the mother, smiling a little at the idea, and at the vehemence of the speaker. 'But, as it is, Erica, I am afraid you must school yourself to endure. After all, I fancy you will be glad to share so soon in your father's vexations.'

'Yes,' said Erica, pushing back the hair from her forehead, and giving herself a kind of mental shaking, 'I am glad of that. After all, they can't spoil the best part of our lives! I shall go into the garden to get rid of my bad temper; it doesn't rain now.'

She struggled to her feet, picked up the little fur hat which had fallen off, kissed her mother, and went out of the room.

The 'garden' was Erica's favourite resort, her own particular property. It was about fifteen feet square, and no one but a Londoner would have bestowed on it so dignified a name. But Erica, who was of an inventive turn, had contrived to make the most of the little patch of ground, had induced ivy to grow on the ugly brick walls, and with infinite care and satisfaction had nursed a few flowers and shrubs into tolerably healthy though smutty life. In one of the corners Tom Craigie, her favourite cousin, had put up a rough wooden bench for her, and here she read and dreamed as contentedly as if her 'garden ground' had been fairyland. Here, too, she invariably came when anything had gone wrong, when the endless troubles about money which had weighed upon her all her life became a little less bearable than usual, or when some act of discourtesy or harshness to her father had roused in her a tingling, burning sense of indignation.

Erica was not one of those people who take life easily: things went very deeply with her. In spite of her brightness and vivacity, in spite

of her readiness to see the ludicrous in everything, and her singularly quick perceptions, she was also very keenly alive to other and graver impressions.

Her anger had passed, but still, as she paced round and round her small domain, her heart was very heavy. Life seemed perplexing to her; but her mother had somehow struck the right key-note when she had spoken of the vexations which might be shared. There was something inspiriting in that thought, certainly, for Erica worshipped her father. By degrees the trouble and indignation died away and a very sweet look stole over the grave little face.

A smutty sparrow came and peered down at her from the ivy-covered wall, and chirped and twittered in quite a friendly way, perhaps recognising the scatterer of its daily bread.

'After all,' thought Erica, 'with ourselves and the animals, we might let the rest of the world treat us as they please. I am glad they can't turn the animals and birds against us! That would be worse than anything.'

Then, suddenly turning from the abstract to

the practical, she took out of her pocket a shabby little sealskin purse.

'Still sixpence of my prize-money over,' she remarked to herself. 'I'll go and buy some scones for tea. Father likes them.'

Erica's father was a Scotchman, and, though so-called scones were to be had at most shops, there was only one place where she could buy scones which she considered worthy the name, and that was at the Scotch baker's in Southampton Row. She hurried along the wet pavements, glad that the rain was over, for as soon as her purchase was completed she made up her mind to indulge for a few minutes in what had lately become a very frequent treat, namely, a pause before a certain tempting store of second-hand books. She had never had money enough to buy anything except the necessary school books, and, being a great lover of poetry, she always seized with avidity on anything that was to be found outside the book-shop. Sometimes she would carry away a verse of Swinburne which would ring in her ears for days and days; sometimes she would read as much as

two or three pages of Shelley. No one had ever interrupted her, and a certain sense of impropriety and daring was rather stimulating than otherwise. It always brought to her mind a saying in the proverbs of Solomon, 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.'

For three successive days she had found to her great delight Longfellow's 'Hiawatha.' The strange metre, the musical Indian names, the delightfully described animals, all served to make the poem wonderfully fascinating to her. She thought a page or two of 'Hiawatha' would greatly sweeten her somewhat bitter world this afternoon, and with her bag of scones in one hand and the book in the other she read on happily, quite unconscious that three pair of eyes were watching her from within the shop.

The wrinkled old man who was the presiding genius of the place had two customers, a tall grey-bearded clergyman with bright, kindly eyes, and his son, the same Brian Osmond whom Erica had charged with her umbrella in Gower Street.

'An outside customer for you,' remarked Charles Osmond, the clergyman, glancing at the shopkeeper. Then to his son, 'What a picture she makes!'

Brian looked up hastily from some medical books which he had been turning over.

'Why, that's my little Gower Street friend,' he exclaimed, the words being somehow surprised out of him, though he would fain have recalled them the next minute.

'I don't interrupt her,' said the shop-owner. 'Her father has done a great deal of business with me, and the little lady has a fancy for poetry, and don't get much of it in her life, I'll be bound.'

'Why, who is she?' asked Charles Osmond, who was on very friendly terms with the old book-collector.

'She's the daughter of Luke Raeburn,' was the reply, 'and whatever folks may say, I know that Mr. Raeburn leads a hard enough life.'

Brian turned away from the speakers, a sickening sense of dismay at his heart. His ideal was the daughter of Luke Raeburn!

And Luke Raeburn was an atheist leader!

For a few minutes he lost consciousness of time and place, though always seeing in a sort of dark mist Erica's lovely face bending over her book. The shop-keeper's casual remark had been a fearful blow to him; yet, as he came to himself again, his heart went out more and more to the beautiful girl who had been brought up in what seemed to him so barren a creed. His dream of love, which had been bright enough only an hour before, was suddenly shadowed by an unthought-of pain, but presently began to shine with a new and altogether different lustre. He began to hear again what was passing between his father and the shop-keeper.

'There's a sight more good in him than folks think. However wrong his views, he believes them right, and is ready to suffer for 'em, too. Bless me, that's odd, to be sure! There is Mr. Raeburn, on the other side of the Row! Fine looking man, isn't he!'

Brian, looking up eagerly, fancied he must be mistaken, for the only passenger in sight

was a very tall man of remarkably benign aspect, middle-aged, yet venerable—or perhaps better described by the word 'devotional-looking,' pervaded too by a certain majesty of calmness which seemed scarcely suited to his character of public agitator. The clean-shaven and somewhat rugged face was unmistakably that of a Scotchman, the thick waves of tawny hair overshadowing the wide brow, and the clear golden-brown eyes showed Brian at once that this could be no other than the father of his ideal.

In the meantime, Raeburn, having caught sight of his daughter, slowly crossed the road, and coming noiselessly up to her, suddenly took hold of the book she was reading, and with laughter in his eyes, said, in a peremptory voice,

'Five shillings to pay, if you please, miss!'

Erica, who had been completely absorbed in the poem, looked up in dismay; then seeing who had spoken she began to laugh.

'What a horrible fright you gave me, father!

But do look at this, it's the loveliest thing in the world. I've just got to the "very strong man Kwasind." I think he's a little like you!'

Raeburn, though no very great lover of poetry, took the book and read a few lines.

> 'Long they lived in peace together,
> Spake with naked hearts together,
> Pondering much and much contriving
> How the tribes of men might prosper.'

'Good! That will do very well for you and me, little one. I'm ready to be your Kwasind. What's the price of the thing—four-and-six-pence! Too much for a luxury. It must wait till our ship comes in.'

He put down the book and they moved on together, but had not gone many paces before they were stopped by a most miserable-looking beggar child. Brian standing now outside the shop, saw and heard all that passed.

Raeburn was evidently investigating the case, Erica a little impatient of the interruption was remonstrating.

'I thought you never gave to beggars, and I am sure that harrowing story is made up.'

'Very likely,' replied her father, 'but the hunger is real, and I know well enough what hunger is. What have you here?' he added, indicating the paper bag which Erica held.

'Scones,' she said, unwillingly.

'That will do,' he said, taking them from her and giving them to the child. 'He is too young to be anything but the victim of another's laziness. There! sit down and eat them while you can.'

The child sat down on a doorstep with the bag of scones clasped in both hands, but he continued to gaze after his benefactor till he had passed out of sight, and there was a strange look of surprise and gratification in his eyes. That was a man who knew! Many people had, after hard begging, thrown him pence, many had warned him off harshly, but this man had looked straight into his eyes, and had at once stopped and questioned him, had singled out the one true statement from a mass of lies, and had given him—not a stale loaf with the top cut off, a suspicious sort of charity which always angered the waif—but his own food,

bought for his own consumption. Most wonderful of all, too, this man knew what it was to be hungry, and had even the insight and shrewdness to be aware that the waif's best chance of eating the scones at all was to eat them then and there. For the first time a feeling of reverence and admiration was kindled in the child's heart; he would have done a great deal for his unknown friend.

Raeburn and Erica had meanwhile walked on in the direction of Guilford Square.

'I had bought them for you,' said Erica reproachfully.

'And I ruthlessly gave them away,' said Raeburn, smiling. 'That was hard lines; I thought they were only household stock. But after all it comes to the same thing in the end, or better. You have given them to me by giving them to the child. Never mind, "Little son Eric!"'

This was his pet name for her, and it meant a great deal to them. She was his only child, and it had at first been a great disappointment to everyone that she was not a boy. But Rae-

burn had long ago ceased to regret this, and the nick-name referred more to Erica's capability of being both son and daughter to him, able to help him in his work and at the same to brighten his home. Erica was very proud of her name, for she had been called after her father's greatest friend Eric Haeberlein, a celebrated republican, who once during a long exile had taken refuge in London. His views were in some respects more extreme than Raeburn's, but in private life he was the gentlest and most fascinating of men, and had quite won the heart of his little namesake.

As Mrs. Raeburn had surmised, Erica's father had at once seen that something had gone wrong that day. The all-observing eyes, which had noticed the hungry look in the beggar child's face, noticed at once that his own child had been troubled.

'Something has vexed you,' he said. 'What is the matter, Erica?'

'I had rather not tell you, father, it isn't anything much,' said Erica, casting down her eyes as if all at once the paving-stones had become absorbingly interesting.

'I fancy I know already,' said Raeburn. 'It is about your friend at the High School, is it not? I thought so. This afternoon I had a letter from her father.'

'What does he say? May I see it?' asked Erica.

'I tore it up,' said Raeburn, 'I thought you would ask to see it, and the thing was really so abominably insolent that I didn't want you to. How did you hear about it?'

'Gertrude wrote me a note,' said Erica.

'At her father's dictation, no doubt,' said Raeburn, 'I should know his style directly, let me see it.'

'I thought it was a pity to vex you, so I burnt it,' said Erica.

Then, unable to help being amused at their efforts to save each other, they both laughed, though the subject was rather a sore one.

'It is the old story,' said Raeburn. 'Life only, as Pope Innocent III. benevolently remarked, "is to be left to the children of misbelievers, and that only as an act of mercy." You must make up your mind to bear

the social stigma, little one. Do you see the moral of this?'

'No,' said Erica, with something between a smile and a sigh.

'The moral of it is that you must be content with your own people,' said Raeburn. 'There is this one good point about persecution—it does draw us all nearer together, really strengthens us in a hundred ways. So, little son Eric, you must forswear school friends and be content with your "very strong man Kwasind," and we will

> "Live in peace together,
> Speak with naked hearts together."

By-the-by, it is rather doubtful if Tom will be able to come to the lecture to-night: do you think you can take notes for me instead?'

This was in reality the most delicate piece of tact and consideration, for it was of course Erica's delight and pride to help her father.

CHAPTER II.

FROM EFFECT TO CAUSE.

Only the acrid spirit of the times,
Corroded this true steel.

LONGFELLOW.

Not Thine the bigot's partial plea,
Not Thine the zealot's ban;
Thou well canst spare a love of Thee
Which ends in hate of man.

WHITTIER.

LUKE RAEBURN was the son of a Scotch clergyman of the Episcopal church. His history, though familiar to his own followers and to them more powerfully convincing than many arguments against modern Christianity, was not generally known. The orthodox were apt

to content themselves with shuddering at the mention of his name; very few troubled themselves to think or inquire how this man had been driven into atheism. Had they done so they might, perhaps, have treated him more considerately, at any rate they must have learnt that the much-disliked prophet of atheism was the most disinterested of men, one who had the courage of his opinions, a man of fearless honesty.

Raeburn had lost his mother very early; his father, a well-to-do man, had held for many years a small living in the west of Scotland. He was rather a clever man, but one-sided and bigoted; cold-hearted, too, and caring very little for his children. Of Luke, however, he was, in his peculiar fashion, very proud, for at an early age the boy showed signs of genius. The father was no great worker; though shrewd and clever, he had no ambition, and was quite content to live out his life in the retired little parsonage where, with no parish to trouble him, and a small and unexacting congregation on Sundays, he could do pretty much as he pleased.

But for his son he was ambitious. Ever since his sixteenth year—when, at a public meeting, the boy had, to the astonishment of everyone, suddenly sprung to his feet and contradicted a false statement made by a great landowner as to the condition of the cottages on his estate—the father had foreseen future triumphs for his son. For the speech though unpremeditated was marvellously clever, and there was a power in it not to be accounted for by a certain ring of indignation; it was the speech of a future orator.

Then, too, Luke had by this time shown signs of religious zeal, a zeal which his father, though far from attempting to copy, could not but admire. His Sunday services over, he relapsed into the comfortable, easy-going life of a country gentleman for the rest of the week; but his son was indefatigable, and, though little more than a boy himself, gathered round him the roughest lads of the village, and by his eloquence, and a certain peculiar personal fascination which he retained all his life, absolutely forced them to listen to him. The father augured great things

for him, and invariably prophesied that he would 'live to see him a bishop yet.'

It was a settled thing that he should take Holy Orders, and for some time Raeburn was only too happy to carry out his father's plans. In his very first term at Cambridge, however, he began to feel doubts, and, becoming convinced that he could never again accept the doctrines in which he had been educated, he told his father that he must give up all thought of taking Orders.

Now, unfortunately, Mr. Raeburn was the very last man to understand or sympathise with any phase of life through which he had not himself passed. He had never been troubled with religious doubts; scepticism seemed to him monstrous and unnatural. He met the confession, which his son had made in pain and diffidence, with a most deplorable want of tact. In answer to the perplexing questions which were put to him, he merely replied testily that Luke had been overworking himself, that he had no business to trouble his head with matters which were beyond him, and

would fain have dismissed the whole affair at once.

'But,' urged the son, 'how is it possible for me to turn my back upon these matters when I am preparing to teach them?'

'Nonsense,' replied the father, angrily. 'Have not I taught all my life, preached twice a Sunday these thirty years without perplexing myself with your questionings! Be off to your shooting and your golf, and let me have no more of this morbid fuss.'

No more was said; but Luke Raeburn, with his doubts and questions shut thus into himself, drifted rapidly from scepticism to the most positive form of unbelief. When he next came home for the long vacation, his father was at length awakened to the fact that the son, upon whom all his ambition was set, was hopelessly lost to the church; and with this consciousness a most bitter sense of disappointment rose in his heart. His pride, the only side of fatherhood which he possessed, was deeply wounded, and his dreams of honourable distinction were laid low. His wrath was great. Luke found the

home made almost unbearable to him. His college career was of course at an end, for his father would not hear of providing him with the necessary funds now that he had actually confessed his atheism. He was hardly allowed to speak to his sisters, every request for money to start him in some profession met with a sharp refusal, and matters were becoming so desperate that he would probably have left the place of his own accord before long, had not Mr. Raeburn himself put an end to a state of things which had grown insufferable.

With some lurking hope, perhaps, of convincing his son, he resolved upon trying a course of argument. To do him justice he really tried to prepare himself for it, dragged down volumes of dusty divines, and got up with much pains Paley's 'watch' argument. There was some honesty, even perhaps a very little love, in his mistaken endeavours; but he did not recognise that, while he himself was unforgiving, unloving, harsh, and self-indulgent, all his arguments for Christianity were of necessity null and void. He argued for the existence of a perfectly-

loving, good God, all the while treating his son with injustice and tyranny. Of course there could be only one result from a debate between the two. Luke Raeburn with his honesty, his great abilities, his gift of reasoning, above all his thorough earnestness, had the best of it.

To be beaten in argument was naturally the one thing which such a man as Mr. Raeburn could not forgive. He might in time have learnt to tolerate a difference of opinion, he would beyond a doubt have forgiven almost any of the failings that he could understand, would have paid his son's college debts without a murmur, would have overlooked anything connected with what he considered the necessary process of 'sowing his wild oats.' But that the fellow should presume to think out the greatest problems in the world, should set up his judgment against Paley's, and worst of all should actually and palpably beat *him* in argument—this was an unpardonable offence.

A stormy scene ensued. The father in ungov-

ernable fury heaped upon the son every abusive epithet he could think of. Luke Raeburn spoke not a word; he was strong and self-controlled; moreover, he knew that he had had the best of the argument. He was human, however, and his heart was wrung by his father's bitterness. Standing there on that summer day, in the study of the Scotch parsonage, the man's future was sealed. He suffered there the loss of all things, but at the very time there sprang up in him an enthusiasm for the cause of free-thought, a passionate, burning zeal for the opinions for which he suffered, which never left him, but served as the great moving impulse of his whole subsequent life.

'I tell you, you are not fit to be in a gentleman's house,' thundered the father. 'A rank atheist, a lying infidel! It is against nature that you should call a parsonage your home.'

'It is not particularly home-like,' said the son, bitterly. 'I can leave it when you please.'

'Can!' exclaimed his father, in a fury, 'you

will leave it, sir, and this very day too! I disown you from this time. I'll have no atheist for my son! Change your views or leave the house at once.'

Perhaps he expected his son to make some compromise; if so he showed what a very slight knowledge he had of his character. Luke Raeburn had certainly not been prepared for such extreme harshness, but with the pain and grief and indignation there rose in his heart a mighty resoluteness. With a face as hard and rugged as the granite rocks without, he wished his father good-bye, and obeyed his orders.

Then had followed such a struggle with the world as few men would have gone through with. Cut off from all friends and relations by his avowal of atheism, and baffled again and again in seeking to earn his living, he had more than once been on the very brink of starvation. By sheer force of will he had won his way, had risen above adverse circumstances, had fought down obstacles, and conquered opposing powers. Before long he had made fresh

friends and gained many followers, for there was an extraordinary magnetism about the man which almost compelled those who were brought into contact with him to reverence him.

It was a curious history. First there had been that time of grievous doubt; then he had been thrown upon the world friendless and penniless, with the beliefs and hopes hitherto most sacred to him dead, and in their place an aching blank. He had suffered much. Treated on all sides with harshness and injustice, it was indeed wonderful that he had not developed into a mere hater, a passionate down-puller. But there was in his character a nobility which would not allow him to rest at this low level. The bitter hostility and injustice which he encountered did indeed warp his mind, and every year of controversy made it more impossible for him to take an unprejudiced view of Christ's teaching; but nevertheless he could not remain a mere destroyer.

In that time of blankness, when he had lost all faith in God, when he had been robbed of friendship and family love, he had seized des-

perately on the one thing left him,—the love of humanity. To him atheism meant not only the assertion—'The word God is a word without meaning, it conveys nothing to my understanding.' He added to this barren confession of an intellectual state, a singularly high code of duty. Such a code as could only have emanated from one about whom there lingered what Carlyle has termed, a great 'Aftershine of Christianity.' He held that the only happiness worth having was that which came to a man while engaged in promoting the general good. That the whole duty of man was to devote himself to the service of others. And he lived his creed.

Like other people he had his faults, but he was always ready to spend and be spent for what he considered the good of others, while every act of injustice called forth his unsparing rebuke, and every oppressed person or cause was sure to meet with his support at whatever cost to himself. His zeal for what he regarded as the 'gospel' of atheism grew and strengthened year by year. He was the untiring advocate of

what he considered the truth. Neither illness, nor small results, nor loss, could quench his ardour, while opposition invariably stimulated him to fresh efforts. After long years of toil, he had at length attained an influential position in the country, and though crippled by debts incurred in the struggle for freedom of speech, and living in absolute penury, he was one of the most powerful men of the day.

The old book-seller had very truly observed that there was more good in him than people thought, he was in fact a noble character twisted the wrong way by clumsy and mistaken handling.

Brian Osmond was by no means bigoted; he had, moreover, known those who were intimate with Raeburn, and consequently had heard enough of the truth about him to disbelieve the gross libels which were constantly being circulated by the unscrupulous among his opponents. Still, as on that November afternoon he watched Raeburn and his daughter down Southampton Row, he was conscious

that for the first time he fully regarded the atheist as a fellow-man. The fact was, that Raeburn had for long years been the champion of a hated cause; he had braved the full flood of opposition; and like an isolated rock had been the mark for so much of the rage and fury of the elements that people who knew him only by name had really learned to regard him more as a target than as a man. It was who could hit him hardest, who could most effectually baffle and ruin him; while the quieter spirits contented themselves with rarely mentioning his obnoxious name, and endeavouring as far as possible to ignore his existence. Brian felt that till now he had followed with the multitude to do evil. He had as far as possible ignored his existence; had even been rather annoyed when his father had once publicly urged that Raeburn should be treated with as much justice and courtesy and consideration as if he had been a Christian. He had been vexed that his father should suffer on behalf of such a man, had been half inclined to put down the scorn and contempt and anger of the narrow-mind-

ed to the atheist's account. The feeling had perhaps been natural, but all was changed now; he only revered his father all the more for having suffered in an unpopular cause. With some eagerness, he went back into the shop to see if he could gather any more particulars from the old book-seller. Charles Osmond had, however, finished his purchases and his conversation, and was ready to go.

'The second house in Guilford Terrace, you say,' he observed, turning at the door. 'Thank you, I shall be sure to find it. Good-day.' Then, turning to his son, he added, 'I had no idea we were such near neighbours! Did you hear what he told me? Mr. Raeburn lives in Guilford Terrace.'

'What, that miserable blind-alley, do you mean, at the other side of the square?'

'Yes, and I'm just going round there now, for our friend, the "Bookworm," tells me he has heard it rumoured that some unscrupulous person, who is going to answer Mr. Raeburn this evening, has hired a band of roughs to make a disturbance at the meeting. Fancy

how indignant Donovan would be! I only wish he were here to take word to Mr. Raeburn.'

'Will he not most likely have heard from some other source?' said Brian.

'Possibly; but I shall go round and see. Such abominations ought to be put down, and if by our own side all the better.'

Brian was only too glad that his father should go, and indeed, he would probably have wished to take the message himself had not his mind been set upon getting the best edition of Longfellow to be found in all London for his ideal. So, at the turning into Guilford Square, the father and son parted.

The book-seller's information had roused in Charles Osmond a keen sense of indignation; he walked on rapidly as soon as he had left his son, and in a very few minutes had reached the gloomy entrance to Guilford Terrace. It was currently reported that Raeburn made fabulous sums by his work, and lived in great luxury; but the real fact was that, whatever his income, few men led so self-denying a life, or voluntarily

endured such privations. Charles Osmond could not help wishing that he could bring some of the intolerant with him down that gloomy little alley, to the door of that comfortless lodging-house. He rang, and was admitted into the narrow passage, then shown into the private study of the great man. The floor was uncarpeted, the window uncurtained, the room was almost dark; but a red glow of firelight served to show a large writing-table strewn with papers, and walls literally lined with books; also on the hearthrug a little figure curled up in the most unconventionally comfortable attitude, dividing her attention between making toast and fondling a loudly-purring cat.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE FROM ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW.

Toleration an attack on Christianity? What, then, are we to come to this pass, to suppose that nothing can support Christianity but the principles of persecution? . . . I am persuaded that toleration, so far from being an attack on Christianity, becomes the best and surest support that can possibly be given to it. . . Toleration is good for all, or it is good for none. . . God forbid! I may be mistaken, but I take toleration to be a part of religion.

BURKE.

ERICA was, apparently, well used to receiving strangers. She put down the toasting-fork, but kept the cat in her arms, as she rose to greet Charles Osmond, and her frank and rather child-like manner fascinated him almost as much as it had fascinated Brian.

'My father will be home in a few minutes,' she said, 'I almost wonder you didn't meet him in the square; he has only just gone to send off a telegram. Can you wait? Or will you leave a message?'

'I will wait, if I may,' said Charles Osmond. 'Oh, don't trouble about a light, I like this dimness very well, and, please, don't let me interrupt you.'

Erica relinquished a vain search for candlelighters, and took up her former position on the hearthrug with her toasting-fork.

'I like the gloaming, too,' she said. 'It's almost the only nice thing which is economical! Everything else that one likes specially costs too much! I wonder whether people with money do enjoy all the great treats.'

'Very soon grow *blasé*, I expect,' said Charles Osmond. 'The essence of a treat is rarity, you see.'

'I suppose it is. But I think I could enjoy ever so many things for years and years without growing *blasée*,' said Erica. 'Sometimes I like just to fancy what life might be if there

were no tiresome Christians, and bigots, and law-suits.'

Charles Osmond laughed to himself in the dim light! the remark was made with such perfect sincerity, and it evidently had not dawned on the speaker that she could be addressing any but one of her father's followers. Yet the words saddened him too. He just caught a glimpse through them of life viewed from a directly opposite point.

'Your father has a law-suit going on now, has he not?' he observed, after a little pause.

'Oh, yes, there is almost always one either looming in the distance or actually going on. I don't think I can ever remember the time when we were quite free. It must feel very funny to have no worries of that kind. I think, if there wasn't always this great load of debt tied round our necks like a millstone, I should feel almost light enough to fly! And then it *is* hard to read in some of those horrid religious papers that father lives an easy-going life. Did you see a dreadful paragraph last week in the *Church Chronicle?*'

'Yes, I did,' said Charles Osmond, sadly.

'It always has been the same,' said Erica. 'Father has a delightful story about an old gentleman who at one of his lectures accused him of being rich and self-indulgent—it was a great many years ago when I was a baby, and father was nearly killing himself with overwork—and he just got up and gave the people the whole history of his day, and it turned out that he had had nothing to eat. Mustn't the old gentleman have felt delightfully done? I always wonder how he looked when he heard about it, and whether after that he believed that atheists are not necessarily everything that's bad.'

'I hope such days as those are over for Mr. Raeburn,' said Charles Osmond, touched both by the anecdote and by the loving admiration of the speaker.

'I don't know,' said Erica, sadly. 'It has been getting steadily worse for the last few years; we have had to give up thing after thing. Before long I shouldn't wonder if these rooms in what father calls "Persecution Alley" grew

too expensive for us. But, after all, it is this sort of thing which makes our own people love him so much, don't you think?'

'I have no doubt it is,' said Charles Osmond, thoughtfully.

And then for a minute or two there was silence. Erica, having finished her toasting, stirred the fire into a blaze, and Charles Osmond sat watching the fair, childish face which looked lovelier than ever in the soft glow of the firelight. What would her future be, he wondered. She seemed too delicate and sensitive for the stormy atmosphere in which she lived. Would the hard life embitter her, or would she sink under it? But there was a certain curve of resoluteness about her well-formed chin which was sufficient answer to the second question, while he could not but think that the best safe-guard against the danger of bitterness lay in her very evident love and loyalty to her father.

Erica in the meantime sat stroking her cat Friskarina, and wondering a little who her visitor could be. She liked him very much and could

not help responding to the bright kindly eyes which seemed to plead for confidence; though he was such an entire stranger, she found herself quite naturally opening out her heart to him.

'I am to take notes at my father's meeting to-night,' she said, breaking the silence, 'and perhaps write the account of it afterwards too; and there's such a delightfully funny man coming to speak on the other side.'

'Mr. Randolph, is it not?'

'Yes, a sort of male Mrs. Malaprop. Oh, such fun!' and, at the remembrance of some past encounter, Erica's eyes positively danced with laughter. But the next minute she was very grave.

'I came to speak to Mr. Raeburn about this evening,' said Charles Osmond. 'Do you know if he has heard of a rumour that this Mr. Randolph has hired a band of roughs to interrupt the meeting?'

Erica made an indignant exclamation.

'Perhaps that was what the telegram was about,' she continued, after a moment's thought.

'We found it here when we came in. Father said nothing, but went out very quickly to answer it. Oh! now we shall have a dreadful time of it, I suppose, and perhaps he'll get hurt again. I did hope they had given up that sort of thing.'

She looked so troubled that Charles Osmond regretted he had said anything, and hastened to assure her that what he had heard was the merest rumour, and very possibly not true.

'I am afraid,' she said, 'it is too bad not to be true.'

It struck Charles Osmond that that was about the saddest little sentence he had ever heard.

Partly wishing to change the subject, partly from real interest, he made some remark about a lovely little picture, the only one in the room; its frame was lighted up by the flickering blaze, and even in the imperfect light he could see that the subject was treated in no ordinary way. It was a little bit of the Thames far away from London, with a bank of many-tinted trees on

one side, and out beyond a range of low hills, purple in the evening light. In the sky was a rosy sunset glow, melting above into saffron colour, and this was reflected in the water, gilding and mellowing the foreground of sedge and water-lilies. But what made the picture specially charming was that the artist had really caught the peculiar solemn stillness of evening; merely to look at that quiet, peaceful river brought a feeling of hush and calmness. It seemed a strange picture to find as the sole ornament in the study of a man who had all his life been fighting the world.

Erica brightened up again, and seemed to forget her anxiety when he questioned her as to the artist.

'There is such a nice story about that picture,' she said, 'I always like to look at it. It was about two years ago, one very cold winter's day, and a woman came with some oil-paintings which she was trying to sell for her husband, who was ill: he was rather a good artist, but had been in bad health for a long time, till at last she had really come to hawking about his

pictures in this way, because they were in such dreadful distress. Father was very much worried just then, there was a horrid libel case going on, and that morning he was very busy, and he sent the woman away rather sharply, said he had no time to listen to her. Then presently he was vexed with himself because she really had looked in great trouble, and he thought he had been harsh, and, though he was dreadfully pressed for time, he would go out into the square to see if he couldn't find her again. I went with him, and we had walked all round and had almost given her up, when we caught sight of her coming out of a house on the opposite side. And then it was so nice, father spoke so kindly to her, and found out more about her history, and said that he was too poor to buy her pictures; but she looked dreadfully tired and cold, so he asked her to come in and rest, and she came and sat by the fire, and stayed to dinner with us, and we looked at her pictures, because she seemed so proud of them and liked us to. One of them was that little river-scene, which father took a great

fancy to, and praised a great deal. She left us her address, and later on, when the libel case was ended, and father had got damages, and so had a little spare money, he sent some to this poor artist, and they were so grateful, though, do you know, I think the dinner pleased them more than the money, and they would insist on sending this picture to father. I'll light the gas, and then you'll see it better.'

She twisted a piece of paper into a spill, and put an end to the gloaming. Charles Osmond stood up to get a nearer view of the painting, and Erica, too, drew nearer, and looked at it for a minute in silence.

'Father took me up the Thames once,' she said, by-and-by. 'It was so lovely. Some day, when all these persecutions are over, we are going to have a beautiful tour, and see all sorts of places. But I don't know when they will be over! As soon as one bigot——' she broke off suddenly, with a stifled exclamation of dismay.

Charles Osmond, in the dim light, with his long grey beard, had not betrayed his clerical

dress; but, glancing round at him now, she saw at once that the stranger to whom she had spoken so unreservedly was by no means one of her father's followers.

'Well!' he said, smiling, half understanding her confusion.

'You are a clergyman!' she almost gasped.

'Yes; why not?'

'I beg your pardon, I never thought—you seemed so much too——'

'Too what?' urged Charles Osmond. Then, as she still hesitated, 'Now, you must really let me hear the end of that sentence, or I shall imagine everything dreadful!'

'Too nice,' murmured Erica, wishing that she could sink through the floor.

But the confession so tickled Charles Osmond that he laughed aloud, and his laughter was so infectious that Erica, in spite of her confusion, could not help joining in it. She had a very keen sense of the ludicrous, and the position was, undoubtedly, a laughable one; still there were certain appalling recollections of the past conversation which soon made her serious

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again. She had talked of persecutions to one who was, at any rate, on the side of the persecutors; had alluded to bigots, and, worst of all, had spoken in no measured terms of 'tiresome Christians.'

She turned, rather shyly, and yet with a touch of dignity, to her visitor, and said,

'It was very careless of me not to notice more; but it was dark, and I am not used to seeing any but our own people here. I am afraid I said things which must have hurt you: I wished you had stopped me.'

The beautiful colour had spread and deepened in her cheeks, and there was something indescribably sweet and considerate in her tone of apology. Charles Osmond was touched by it.

'It is I who should apologise,' he said. 'I am not at all sure that I was justified in sitting there quietly, knowing that you were under a delusion; but it is always very delightful to me in this artificial world to meet anyone who talks quite naturally, and the interest of hearing your view of the question kept me

silent. You must forgive me, and as you know I'm too nice to be a clergyman——'

'Oh, I beg your pardon! How rude I have been,' cried Erica, blushing anew, 'but you did make me say it.'

'Of course, and I take it as a high compliment from you,' said Charles Osmond, laughing again at the recollection. 'Come, may we not seal our friendship? We have been sufficiently frank with each other to be something more than acquaintances for the future.'

Erica held out her hand and found it taken in a strong, firm clasp, which somehow conveyed much more than an ordinary handshake.

'And, after all, you *are* too nice for a clergyman!' she thought to herself. Then, as a fresh idea crossed her mind, she suddenly exclaimed, 'But you came to tell us about Mr. Randolph's roughs, did you not? How came you to care that we should know beforehand?'

'Why, naturally, I hoped that a disturbance might be stopped.'

'Is it natural?' questioned Erica. 'I should

have thought it more natural for you to think with your own party.'

'But peace and justice and freedom of speech must all stand before party questions.'

'Yet you think that we are wrong and that Christianity is right?'

'Yes, but to my mind perfect justice is part of Christianity.'

'Oh,' said Erica, in a tone which meant unutterable things.

'You think that Christians do not show perfect justice to you?' said Charles Osmond, reading her thoughts.

'I can't say I think they do,' she replied. Then, suddenly firing up at the recollection of her afternoon's experiences, she said, 'They are not just to us, though they preach justice; they are not loving, though they talk about love! If they want us to think their religion true, I wonder they don't practise it a little more and preach it less. What is the use of talking of "brotherly kindness and charity" when they hardly treat us like human beings, when they make up wicked lies about us, and will hardly

let us sit in the same room with them!'

'Come, now, we really are sitting in the same room,' said Charles Osmond, smiling.

'Oh, dear, what am I to do!' exclaimed Erica. 'I can't remember that you are one of them! you are so very unlike most.'

'I think,' said Charles Osmond, 'you have come across some very bad specimens.'

Erica in her heart considered her visitor as the exception which proved the rule; but, not wishing to be caught tripping again, she resolved to say no more upon the subject.

'Let us talk of something else,' she said.

'Something nicer?' said Charles Osmond, with a little mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

'Safer,' said Erica, laughing. 'But, stop, I hear my father.'

She went out into the passage to meet him. Charles Osmond heard her explaining his visit and the news he had brought, heard Raeburn's brief responses; then, in a few moments, the two entered the room, a picturesque-looking couple, the clergyman thought, the tall, stately man with his broad forehead and overshadow-

ing masses of auburn hair, the little, eager-faced impetuous girl, so winsome in her unconventional frankness.

The conversation became a trifle more ceremonious, though with Erica perched on the arm of her father's chair, ready to squeeze his hand at every word which pleased her, it could hardly become stiff. Raeburn had just heard the report of Mr. Randolph's scheme and had already taken precautionary measures; but he was surprised and gratified that Charles Osmond should have troubled to bring him word about it. The two men talked on with the most perfect friendliness, and by-and-by, to Erica's great delight, Charles Osmond expressed a wish to be present at the meeting that night, and made inquiries as to the time and place.

'Oh, couldn't you stay to tea and go with us?' she exclaimed, forgetting for the third time that he was a clergyman, and offering the ready hospitality she would have offered to anyone else.

'I should be delighted,' he said, smiling, 'if you can really put up with one of the cloth.'

Raeburn, amused at his daughter's spontaneous hospitality and pleased with the friendly acceptance it had met with, was quite ready to second the invitation. Erica was delighted; she carried off the cat and the toast into the next room, eager to tell her mother all about the visitor.

'The most delightful man, mother, not a bit like a clergyman! I didn't find out for ever so long what he was, and said all sorts of dreadful things, but he didn't mind and was not the least offended.'

'When will you learn to be cautious, I wonder,' said Mrs. Raeburn, smiling. 'You are a shocking little chatterbox.'

And as Erica flitted busily about, arranging the tea-table, her mother watched her half amusedly, half anxiously. She had always been remarkably frank and outspoken, and there was something so transparently sincere about her that she seldom gave offence; but the mother could not help wondering how it would be as she grew older and mixed with a greater variety of people. In fact, in every

way she was anxious about the child's future, for Erica's was a somewhat perplexing character, and seemed very ill-fitted for her position.

Eric Haeberlein had once compared her to a violin, and there was a good deal of truth in his idea. She was very sensitive, responding at once to the merest touch, and easily moved to admiration and devoted love, or to strong indignation. Naturally high-spirited, she was subject, too, to fits of depression, and was always either in the heights or the depths. Yet with all these characteristics was blended her father's indomitable courage and tenacity; though feeling the thorns of life far more keenly than most people, she was one of those who will never yield; though pricked and wounded by outward events, she would never be conquered by circumstance. At present her capabilities for adoration, which were very great, were lavished in two directions: in the abstract she worshipped intellect, in the concrete she worshipped her father.

From the grief and indignation of the afternoon, she had passed with extraordinary rapidity

to a state of merriment which would have been incomprehensible to one who did not understand her peculiarly complex character. Mrs. Raeburn listened with a good deal of amusement to her racy description of Charles Osmond.

'Strange that this should have happened so soon after our talk this afternoon,' she said, musingly. 'Perhaps it is as well that you should have a glimpse of the other side, against which you were inveighing, or you might be growing narrow.'

'He is much too good to belong to them!' said Erica, enthusiastically.

As she spoke, Raeburn entered, bringing the visitor with him, and they all sat down to their meal, Erica pouring out tea and attending to everyone's wants, fondling her cat, and listening to the conversation, with all the time a curious perception that to sit down to table with one of her father's opponents was a very novel experience. She could not help speculating as to the thoughts and impressions of her companions. Her mother was, she thought, pleased and interested, for about her worn face there was

the look of contentment which invariably came when for a time the bitterness of the struggle of life was broken by any sign of friendliness. Her father was—as he generally was in his own house—quiet, gentle in manner, ready to be both an attentive and an interested listener. This gift he had almost as markedly as the gift of speech; he at once perceived that his guest was no ordinary man, and by a sort of instinct he had discovered on what subjects he was best calculated to speak, and wherein they could gain most from him. Charles Osmond's thoughts she could only speculate about; but that he was ready to take them all as friends, and did not regard them as a different order of beings, was plain.

The conversation had drifted into regions of abstruse science, when Erica, who had been listening attentively, was altogether diverted by the entrance of the servant, who brought her a brown-paper parcel. Eagerly opening it, she was almost bewildered by the delightful surprise of finding a complete edition of Longfellow's poems, bound in dark-blue morocco.

Inside was written, 'From another admirer of "Hiawatha."'

She started up with a rapturous exclamation, and the two men paused in their talk, each unable to help watching the beautiful little face all aglow with happiness. Erica almost danced round the room with her new treasure.

'What *heavenly* person can have sent me this!' she cried. 'Look, father! Did you ever see such a beauty!'

Science went to the winds, and Raeburn gave all his sympathy to Erica and Longfellow.

'The very thing you were wishing for! Who could have sent it?'

'I can't think! It can't be Tom, because I know he's spent all his money, and Auntie would never call herself an admirer of "Hiawatha," nor Herr Haeberlein, nor Monsieur Noirol, nor anyone I can think of.'

'Dealings with the fairies,' said Raeburn, smiling. 'Your beggar-child with the scones suddenly transformed into a beneficent rewarder.'

'Not from you, father?'

Raeburn laughed.

'A pretty substantial fairy for you! No, no, I had no hand in it. I can't give you presents while I am in debt, my bairn.'

'Oh, isn't it jolly to get what one wants!' said Erica, with a fervour which made the three grown-up people laugh.

'Very jolly,' said Raeburn, giving her a little mute caress. 'But now, Eric, please to go back and eat something, or I shall have my reporter fainting in the middle of a speech.'

She obeyed, carrying away the book with her and enlivening them with extracts from it; once delightedly discovering a most appropriate passage.

'Why, of course!' she exclaimed, 'you and Mr. Osmond, father, are smoking the Peace-Pipe!' And with much force and animation she read them bits from the first canto.

Raeburn left the room before long to get ready for his meeting, but Erica still lingered over her new treasure, putting it down at length with great reluctance to prepare her note-book and sharpen her pencil.

'Isn't that a delightful bit where Hiawatha

was angry,' she said, 'it has been running in my head all day—

> "For his heart was hot within him,
> Like a living coal his heart was."

That's what I shall feel like to-night when Mr. Randolph attacks father.'

She ran upstairs to dress, and, as the door closed upon her, Mrs. Raeburn turned to Charles Osmond with a sort of apology.

'She finds it very hard not to speak out her thoughts; it will often get her into trouble, I am afraid.'

'It is too fresh and delightful to be checked though,' said Charles Osmond, 'I assure you she has taught me many a lesson to-night.'

The mother talked on almost unreservedly about the subject that was evidently nearest her heart—the difficulties of Erica's education, the harshness they so often met with, the harm it so evidently did the child—till the subject of the conversation came down again, much too excited and happy to care just then for any unkind treatment. Had she not got a Longfellow of her very own, and did not

that unexpected pleasure make up for a thousand privations and discomforts!

Yet, with all her childishness and impetuosity, Erica was womanly too, as Charles Osmond saw by the way she waited on her mother, thinking of everything which the invalid could possibly want while they were gone, brightening the whole place with her sunshiny presence. Whatever else was lacking, there was no lack of love in this house. The tender considerateness which softened Erica's impetuosity in her mother's presence, the loving comprehension between parent and child, was very beautiful to see.

CHAPTER IV.

'SUPPOSING IT IS TRUE!'

A man who strives earnestly and perseveringly to convince others, at least convinces us that he is convinced himself.

Guesses at Truth.

THE rainy afternoon had given place to a fine and starlight night. Erica, apparently in high spirits, walked between her father and Charles Osmond.

'Mother won't be anxious about us,' she said. 'She has not heard a word about Mr. Randolph's plans. I was so afraid some one would speak about it at tea-time, and then she would have been in a fright all the evening, and would not have liked my going.'

'Mr. Randolph is both energetic and unscrupulous,' said Raeburn. 'But I doubt if even he would set his roughs upon you, little one, unless he has become as bloodthirsty as a certain old Scotch psalm we used to sing.'

'What was that?' questioned Erica.

'I forget the beginning, but the last verse always had a sort of horrible fascination for us—

> "How happy should that trooper be
> Who, riding on a naggie,
> Should take thy little children up,
> And dash them 'gin the craggie!"'

Charles Osmond and Erica laughed heartily.

'They will only dash you against metaphorical rocks in the nineteenth century,' continued Raeburn. 'I remember wondering why the old clerk in my father's church always sang that verse so lustily; but you see we have exactly the same spirit now, only in a more civilised form, barbarity changed to polite cruelty, as for instance the way you were treated this afternoon.'

'Oh, don't talk about that,' said Erica, quickly, 'I am going to enjoy my Longfellow and forget the rest.'

In truth, Charles Osmond was struck with this both in the father and daughter; each had a way of putting back their bitter thoughts, of dwelling whenever it was possible on the brighter side of life. He knew that Raeburn was involved in most harassing litigation, was burdened with debt, was confronted everywhere with bitter and often violent opposition; yet he seemed to live above it all, for there was a wonderful repose about him, an extraordinary serenity in his aspect, which would have seemed better fitted to a hermit than to one who had spent his life in fighting against desperate odds. One thing was quite clear, the man was absolutely convinced that he was suffering for the truth, and was ready to endure anything in what he considered the service of his fellow-men. He did not seem particularly anxious as to the evening's proceedings. On the whole, they were rather a merry party as they walked along Gower Street to the station.

But when they got out again at their destination, and walked through the busy streets to the hall where the lecture was to be given, a sort of seriousness fell upon all three. They were each going to work in their different ways for what they considered the good of humanity, and instinctively a silence grew and deepened.

Erica was the first to break it as they came in sight of the hall.

'What a crowd there is!' she exclaimed. 'Are these Mr. Randolph's roughs?'

'We can put up with them outside,' said Raeburn; but Charles Osmond noticed that as he spoke he drew the child nearer to him, with a momentary look of trouble in his face, as though he shrank from taking her through the rabble. Erica, on the other hand, looked interested and perfectly fearless. With great difficulty they forced their way on, hooted and yelled at by the mob, who, however, made no attempt at violence. At length, reaching the shelter of the entrance lobby, Raeburn left them for a moment, pausing to give directions to the doorkeepers.

Just then, to his great surprise, Charles Osmond caught sight of his son standing only a few paces from them. His exclamation of astonishment made Erica look up. Brian came forward eagerly to meet them.

'You here!' exclaimed his father, with a latent suspicion confirmed into a certainty. 'This is my son, Miss Raeburn.'

Brian had not dreamed of meeting her, he had waited about, curious to see how Raeburn would get on with the mob; it was with a strange pang of rapture and dismay that he had seen his fair little ideal. That she should be in the midst of that hooting mob made his heart throb with indignation, yet there was something so sweet in her grave stedfast face that he was, nevertheless, glad to have witnessed the scene. Her colour was rather heightened, her eyes bright but very quiet, yet as Charles Osmond spoke, and she looked at Brian, her face all at once lighted up, and with an irresistible smile she exclaimed, in the most childlike of voices,

'Why, it's my umbrella man!' The informality of the exclamation seemed to make them at once

something more than ordinary acquaintances. They told Charles Osmond of their encounter in the afternoon, and in a very few minutes Brian, hardly knowing whether he were not in some strange dream, found himself sitting with his father and Erica in a crowded lecture hall, realising with an intensity of joy and an intensity of pain how near he was to the queen of his heart and yet how far from her.

The meeting was quite orderly. Though Raeburn was addressing many who disagreed with him, he had evidently got the whole and undivided attention of his audience; and indeed his gifts both as rhetorician and orator were so great that they must have been either wilfully deaf or obtuse who, when under the spell of his extraordinary earnestness and eloquence, could resist listening. Not a word was lost on Brian; every sentence which emphasised the great difference of belief between himself and his love seemed to engrave itself on his heart; no minutest detail of that evening escaped him.

He saw the tall, commanding figure of the ora-

tor, the vast sea of upturned faces below, the eager attention imprinted on all, sometimes a wave of sympathy and approval sweeping over them, resulting in a storm of applause, at times a more divided disapproval, or a shout of 'No, no,' which invariably roused the speaker to a more vigorous, clear, and emphatic repetition of the questioned statement. And, through all, he was ever conscious of the young girl at his side, who with her head bent over her note-book was absorbed in her work. While the most vital questions of life were being discussed, he was yet always aware of that hand travelling rapidly to and fro, of the pages hurriedly turned, of the quick yet weary looking change of posture.

Though not without a strong vein of sarcasm, Raeburn's speech was, on the whole, temperate; it certainly should have been met with consideration. But, unfortunately, Mr. Randolph was incapable of seeing any good in his opponent; his combative instincts were far stronger than his Christianity, and Brian, who had winced many times while listening to the champion of atheism, was even more keenly wounded by the cham-

pion of his own cause. Abusive epithets abounded in his retort; at last he left the subject under discussion altogether, and lannched into personalities of the most objectionable kind. Raeburn sat with folded arms, listening with a sort of cold dignity. He looked very different now from the genial-mannered, quiet man whom Charles Osmond had seen in his own home but an hour or two ago. There was a peculiar look in his tawny eyes hardly to be described in words, a look which was hard, and cold, and steady. It told of an originally sensitive nature, inured to ill-treatment; of a strong will which had long ago steeled itself to endure; of a character which, though absolutely refusing to yield to opposition, had grown slightly bitter, even slightly vindictive in the process.

Brian could only watch in silent pain the little figure beside him. Once at some violent term of abuse she looked up, and glanced for a moment at the speaker; he just caught a swift, indignant flash from her bright eyes, then her head was bent lower than before over her note-book, and the carnation deepened in her

cheek, whilst her pencil sped over the paper fast and furiously. Presently came a sharp retort from Raeburn, ending with the perfectly warrantable accusation that Mr. Randolph was wandering from the subject of the evening merely to indulge his personal spite. The audience was beginning to be roused by the unfairness, and a storm might have ensued had not Mr. Randolph unintentionally turned the whole proceedings from tragedy to farce.

Indignant at Raeburn's accusation, he sprang to his feet and began a vigorous protest.

'Mr. Chairman, I denounce my opponent as a liar. His accusation is utterly false. I deny the allegation, and I scorn the allegator——!'

He was interrupted by a shout of laughter, the whole assembly was convulsed, even Erica's anger changed to mirth.

'Fit for *Punch*,' she whispered to Brian, her face all beaming with merriment.

Raeburn, whose grave face had also relaxed into a smile, suddenly stood up, and, with a sort of dry Scotch humour, remarked,

'My enemies have compared me to many ob-

noxious things, but never till to-night have I been called a crocodile! Possibly Mr. Randolph has been reading of the crocodiles recently dissected at Paris. It has been discovered that they are almost brainless, and, being without reason, are probably animated by a violent instinct of destruction. I believe, however, that the power of their "jaw" is unsurpassed!'

Then, amidst shouts of laughter and applause, he sat down again, leaving the field to the much discomfited Mr. Randolph.

Much harm had been done that evening to the cause of Christianity. The sympathies of the audience could not be with the weak and unmannerly Mr. Randolph; they were Englishmen, and were, of course, inclined to side with the man who had been unjustly dealt with, who, moreover, had really spoken to them—had touched their very hearts.

The field was practically lost when, to the surprise of all, another speaker came forward. Erica, who knew that their side had had the best of it, felt a thrill of admiration when she saw Charles Osmond move slowly to the front

of the platform. She was very tired, but out of a sort of gratitude for his friendliness, a readiness to do him honour, she strained her energies to take down his speech verbatim. It was not a long one, it was hardly, perhaps, to be called a speech at all, it was rather as if the man had thrown his very self into the breach made by the unhappy wrangle of the evening.

He spoke of the universal brotherhood and of the wrong done to it by bitterness and strife; he stood there as the very incarnation of brotherliness, and the people, whether they agreed with him or not, loved him. In the place where the religion of Christ had been reviled as well by the Christian as by the atheist, he spoke of the revealer of the Father, and a hush fell on the listening men; he spoke of the Founder of the great brotherhood, and by the very reality, by the fervour of his convictions, touched a new chord in many a heart. It was no time for argument, the meeting was almost over; he scarcely attempted an answer to many of the difficulties and objections raised by Raeburn earlier in the evening. But there was in his

ten minutes' speech the whole essence of Christianity, the spirit of loving sacrifice of self, the strength of an absolute certainty which no argument, however logical, can shake, the extraordinary power which breathes in the assertion, 'I *know* Him whom I have believed.'

To more than one of Raeburn's followers there came just the slightest agitation of doubt, the questioning whether these things might not be. For the first time in her life the question began to stir in Erica's heart. She had heard many advocates of Christianity, and had regarded them much as we might regard Buddhist missionaries speaking of a religion that had had its day and was now only fit to be discarded, or perhaps studied as an interesting relic of the past, about which in its later years many corruptions had gathered.

Raeburn, being above all things a just man, had been determined to give her mind no bias in favour of his own views, and as a child he had left her perfectly free. But there was a certain Scotch proverb which he did not call to mind, that 'As the auld cock craws, the young

cock learns.' When the time came at which he considered her old enough really to study the Bible for herself, she had already learnt from bitter experience that Christianity—at any rate, what called itself Christianity—was the religion whose votaries were constantly slandering and ill-treating her father, and that all the privations and troubles of their life were directly or indirectly due to it. She of course identified the conduct of the most unfriendly and persecuting with the religion itself; it could hardly be otherwise.

But to-night as she toiled away, bravely acting up to her lights, taking down the opponent's speech to the best of her abilities, though predisposed to think it all a meaningless rhapsody, the faintest attempt at a question began to take shape in her mind. It did not form itself exactly into words, but just lurked there like a cloud-shadow,—'Supposing Christianity were true?'

All doubt is pain. Even this faint beginning of doubt in her creed made Erica dreadfully uncomfortable. Yet she could not regret that Charles Osmond had spoken, even though she

imagined him to be greatly mistaken, and feared that that uncomfortable question might have been suggested to others among the audience. She could not wish that the speech had not been made, for it had revealed the nobility of the man, his broad-hearted love, and she instinctively reverenced all the really great and good, however widely different their creeds.

Brian tried in vain to read her thoughts; but as soon as the meeting was over her temporary seriousness vanished, and she was once more almost a child again, ready to be amused by anything. She stood for a few minutes talking to the two Osmonds; then, catching sight of an acquaintance a little way off, she bade them a hasty good-night, much to Brian's chagrin, and hurried forward with a warmth of greeting which he could only hope was appreciated by the thick-set honest-looking mechanic who was the happy recipient. When they left the hall, she was still deep in conversation with him.

The fates were kind, however, to Brian that day; they were just too late for a train, and

before the next one arrived, Raeburn and Erica were seen slowly coming down the steps, and in another minute had joined them on the platform. Charles Osmond and Raeburn fell into an amicable discussion, and Brian, to his great satisfaction, was left to an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* with Erica. There had been no further demonstration by the crowd, and Erica, now that the anxiety was over, was ready to make fun of Mr. Randolph and his band, checking herself every now and then for fear of hurting her companion, but breaking forth again and again into irresistible merriment as she recalled the 'alligator' incident and other grotesque utterances. All too soon they reached their destination. There was still, however, a ten minutes' walk before them, a walk which Brian never forgot. The wind was high, and it seemed to excite Erica; he could always remember exactly how she looked, her eyes bright and shining, her short, auburn hair all blown about by the wind, one stray wave lying across the quaint little sealskin hat. He remembered, too, how, in the middle of his argument, Raeburn had stepped

forward, and had wrapped a white woollen scarf more closely round the child, securing the fluttering ends. Brian would have liked to do it himself had he dared, and yet it pleased him, too, to see the father's thoughtfulness; perhaps, in that 'touch of nature,' he for the first time fully recognised his kinship with the atheist.

Erica talked to him in the meantime with a delicious, childlike frankness, gave him an enthusiastic account of her friend Hazeldine, the working-man whom he had seen her speaking to, and unconsciously revealed in her free conversation a great deal of the life she led, a busy, earnest, self-denying life Brian could see. When they reached the place of their afternoon's encounter, she alluded merrily to what she called the 'charge of umbrellas.'

'Who would have thought, now, that in a few hours' time we should have learnt to know each other!' she exclaimed. 'It has been altogether the very oddest day, a sort of sandwich of good and bad, two bits of the dry bread of persecution, but in between, you and Mr. Osmond and my beautiful new Longfellow.'

Brian could not help laughing at the simile, and was not a little pleased to hear the reference to his book; but his amusement was soon dispelled by a grim little incident. Just at that minute they happened to pass an undertaker's cart which was standing at the door of one of the houses; a coffin was borne across the pavement in front of them. Erica, with a quick exclamation, put her hand on his arm and shrank back to make room for the bearers to pass. Looking down at her, he saw that she was quite pale. The coffin was carried into the house and they passed on.

'How I do hate seeing anything like that!' she exclaimed. Then looking back and up to the windows of the house, 'Poor people! I wonder whether they are very sad. It seems to make all the world dark when one comes across things like that. Father thinks it is good to be reminded of the end, that it makes one more eager to work, but he doesn't even wish for anything after death, nor do any of the best people I know. It is silly of me, but I never can bear to think of quite coming to an

end, I suppose because I am not so unselfish as the others.'

'Or may it not be a natural instinct which is implanted in all, which perhaps you have not yet crushed by argument.'

Erica shook her head.

'More likely to be a little bit of one of my covenanting ancestors coming out in me. Still I own that the hope of the hereafter is the one point in which you have the better of it. Life must seem very easy if you believe that all will be made up to you and all wrong set right after you are dead. You see we have rather hard measure here, and don't expect anything at all by-and-by. But all the same I am always rather ashamed of this instinct, or selfishness, or Scottish inheritance, whichever it is!'

'Ashamed! why should you be?'

'It is a sort of weakness, I think, which strong characters like my father are without. You see he cares so much for everyone, and thinks so much of making the world a little less miserable in this generation, but most of my love is for him and for my mother; and so when

I think of death—of their death——' she broke off abruptly.

'Yet do not call it selfishness,' said Brian, with a slightly choked feeling, for there had been a depth of pain in Erica's tone. 'My father, who has just that love of humanity of which you speak, has still the most absolute belief in—yes, and longing for—immortality. It is no selfishness in him.'

'I am sure it is not,' said Erica, warmly, 'I shouldn't think he could be selfish in any way. I am glad he spoke to-night; it does one good to hear a speech like that, even if one doesn't agree with it. I wish there were a few more clergymen like him, then perhaps the tolerance and brotherliness he spoke of might become possible. But it must be a long way off, or it would not seem such an unheard-of thing that I should be talking like this to you. Why, it is the first time in my whole life that I have spoken to a Christian except on the most every-day subjects.'

'Then I hope you won't let it be the last,' said Brian.

'I should like to know Mr. Osmond better,' said Erica, 'for you know it seems very extraordinary to me that a clever scientific man can speak as he spoke to-night. I should like to know how you reconcile all the contradictions, how you *can* believe what seems to me so unlikely, how even if you do believe in a God you can think Him good while the world is what it is. If there is a good God why doesn't he make us all know him, and end all the evil and cruelty?'

Brian did not reply for a moment. The familiar gaslit streets, the usual number of passengers, the usual careworn or viceworn faces passing by, damp pavements, muddy roads, fresh winter wind, all seemed so natural, but to talk of the deepest things in heaven and earth was so unnatural! He was a very reserved man, but looking down at the eager, questioning face beside him his reserve all at once melted. He spoke very quietly, but in a voice which showed Erica that he was, at least, as she expressed it 'honestly deluded.' Evidently he did from his very heart believe what he said.

'But how are we to judge what is best?' he replied. 'My belief is that God is slowly and gradually educating the world, not forcing it on unnaturally, but drawing it on step by step, making it work out its own lessons as the best teachers do with their pupils. To me the idea of a steady progression, in which man himself may be a co-worker with God, is far more beautiful than the conception of a Being who does not work by natural laws at all, but arbitrarily causes this and that to be or not to be.'

'But then if your God is educating the world, He is educating many of us in ignorance of Himself, in atheism. How can that be good or right? Surely you, for instance, must be rather puzzled when you come across atheists, if you believe in a perfect God, and think atheism the most fearful mistake possible?'

'If I could not believe that God can, and does, educate some of us through atheism I should indeed be miserable,' said Brian, with a thrill of pain in his voice which startled Erica. 'But I do believe that even atheism, even blank ignorance of Him, may be a stage through

which alone some of us can be brought onward. The noblest man I ever knew passed through that stage, and I can't think he would have been half the man he is if he had not passed through it.'

'I have only known two or three people who from atheists became theists, and they were horrid!' said Erica, emphatically. 'People always are spiteful to the side they have left.'

'You could not say that of my friend,' said Brian, musingly. 'I wish you could meet him.'

They had reached the entrance to Guilford Terrace, Raeburn and Charles Osmond overtook them, and the conversation ended abruptly. Perhaps because Erica had made no answer to the last remark, and was conscious of a touch of malice in her former speech, she put a little additional warmth into her farewell. At any rate, there was that which touched Brian's very heart in the frank innocence of her hand-clasp, in the sweet yet questioning eyes that were raised to his.

He turned away, happier and yet sadder than

he had ever been in his life. Not a word passed between him and his father as they crossed the square, but when they reached home they instinctively drew together over the study fire. There was a long silence even then, broken at last by Charles Osmond.

'Well, my son?' he said.

'I cannot see how I can be of the least use to her,' said Brian, abruptly, as if his father had been following the whole of his train of thought, which, indeed, to a certain extent he had.

'Was this afternoon your first meeting?'

'Our first speaking. I have seen her many times, but only to-day realised what she is.'

'Well, your little Undine is very bewitching, and much more than bewitching, true to the core and loyal and loving. If only the hardness of her life does not embitter her, I think she will make a grand woman.'

'Tell me what you did this afternoon,' said Brian, 'you must have been some time with them.'

Charles Osmond told him all that had passed; then continued,

'She is, as I said, a fascinating bright little Undine, inclined to be wilful, I should fancy, and with a sort of warmth and quickness about her whole character; in many ways still a child, and yet in others strangely old for her years; on the whole I should say as fair a specimen of the purely natural being as you would often meet with. The spiritual part of her is, I fancy, asleep.'

'No, I fancy to-night has made it stir for the first time,' said Brian, and he told his father a little of what had passed between himself and Erica.

'And the Longfellow was, I suppose, from you,' said Charles Osmond. 'I wish you could have seen her delight over it! Words absolutely failed her. I don't think anyone else noticed it, but, her own vocabulary coming to an end, she turned to ours, it was "What *heavenly* person can have sent me this?"'

Brian smiled, but sighed too.

'One talks of the spiritual side remaining

untouched,' he said, 'yet how is it ever to be otherwise than chained and fettered, while such men as that Randolph are recognised as the champions of our cause, while injustice and unkindness meet her at every turn, while it is something rare and extraordinary for a Christian to speak a kind word to her! If to-day she has first realised that Christians need not necessarily behave as brutes, I have realised a little what life is from her point of view.'

'Then realising that perhaps you may help her, perhaps another chapter of the old legend may come true, and you may be the means of waking the spirit in your Undine.'

'I? Oh, no! How can you think of it! You or Donovan, perhaps, but even that idea seems to me wildly improbable.'

There was something in his humility and sadness which touched his father inexpressibly.

'Well,' he said, after a pause, 'if you are really prepared for all the suffering this love must bring you, if you mean to take it, and cherish it, and live for it, even though it brings

you no gain, but apparent pain and loss, then I think it can only raise both you and your Undine.'

Brian knew that not one man in a thousand would have spoken in such a way: his father's unworldliness was borne in upon him as it had never been before. Greatly as he had always reverenced and loved him, to-night his love and reverence deepened unspeakably—the two were drawn nearer to each other than ever.

It was not the habit in this house to make the most sacred ties of life the butt for ill-timed and ill-judged joking. No knight of old thought or spoke more reverently or with greater reserve of his lady-love than did Brian of Erica. He regarded himself now as one bound to do her service, consecrated from that day forward as her loyal knight.

CHAPTER V.

ERICA'S RESOLVE.

Men are tatooed with their special beliefs like so many South-Sea Islanders; but a real human heart, with Divine love in it, beats with the same glow under all the patterns of all earth's thousand tribes.

O. WENDELL HOLMES.

FOR the next fortnight Brian and Erica continued to pass each other every afternoon in Gower Street, as they had done for so long, the only difference was that now they greeted each other, that occasionally Brian would be rendered happy for the rest of the day by some brief, passing remark from his Undine, or by one of her peculiarly bright smiles. One day, however, she actually stopped; her face was radiant.

'I must just tell you our good news,' she said. 'My father has won his case, and has got heavy damages.'

'I am very glad,' said Brian. 'It must be a great relief to you all to have it over.'

'Immense! Father looks as if a ton's weight had been taken off his mind! Now I hope we shall have a little peace.'

With a hasty good-bye, she hurried on, an unusual elasticity in her light footsteps. In Guilford Square she met a political friend of her father's, and was brought once more to a stand-still. This time it was a little unwillingly, for Monsieur Noirol teased her unmercifully, and at their last meeting had almost made her angry by talking of a friend of his at Paris who offered untold advantages to any clever and well-educated English girl who wished to learn the language, and who would in return teach her own. Erica had been made miserable by the mere suggestion that such a situation would suit her; the slightest hint that it might be well for her to go abroad had roused in her a sort of terror lest her father might ever seriously think of the

scheme. She had not quite forgiven Monsieur Noirol for having spoken, although the proposal had not been gravely made, and probably only persevered in out of the spirit of teasing. But to-day Monsieur Noirol looked very grave.

'You have heard our good news?' said Erica. 'Now, don't begin again about Madame Lemercier's school; I don't want to be made cross to-day of all days, when I am so happy!'

'I will tease you no more, dear mademoiselle,' said the Frenchman; but he offered no congratulations, and there was something in his manner which make Erica uneasy.

'Is anything wrong? Has anything happened?' she asked, quickly.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

'Who knows! It is an evil world, Mademoiselle Erica, as you will realise when you have lived in it as long as I have. But I detain you. Good-bye. *Au revoir!*'

He took off his hat with a flourish, and passed on.

Erica, feeling baffled and a little cross, hurried home. Monsieur Noirol had not teased

her to-day, but he had been inscrutable and tiresome, and he had made her feel uneasy. She opened the front door, and went at once to her father's study, pausing for a moment at the sound of voices within. She recognised, however, that it was her cousin, Tom Craigie, who was speaking, and without more delay she entered. Then in a moment she understood why M. Noirol had been so mysterious. Tom was speaking quickly and strongly, and there was a glow of anger on his face. Her father was standing with his back to the mantelpiece, there was a sort of cold light in his eyes, which filled Erica with dismay. Never in the most anxious days had she seen him look at once so angry, yet so weighed down with care.

'What is the matter?' she questioned, breathlessly, instinctively turning to Tom, whose hot anger was more approachable.

'The scamp of a Christian has gone bankrupt,' he said, referring to the defendant in the late action, but too furious to speak very intelligibly.

'Mr. Cheale, you mean?' asked Erica.

'The scoundrel! Yes! So not a farthing of costs and damages shall we see! It's the most fiendish thing ever heard of!'

'Will the costs be very heavy?'

'Heavy! I should think they would indeed!' He named the probable sum; it seemed a fearful addition to the already existing burden of debts.

A look of such pain and perplexity came over Erica's face that Raeburn, for the first time realising what was passing in the room, drew her towards him, his face softening, and the cold angry light in his eyes changing to sadness.

'Never mind, my child,' he said, with a sigh. ''Tis a hard blow, but we must bear up. Injustice won't triumph in the end.'

There was something in his voice and look which made Erica feel dreadfully inclined to cry; but that would have disgraced her for ever in the eyes of stoical Tom, so she only squeezed his hand hard and tried to think of that far distant future of which she had spoken to Charles Osmond, when there would be no tiresome Christians and bigots and law-suits.'

There was, however, one person in the house who was invariably the recipient of all the troubled confidences of others. In a very few minutes Erica had left the study and was curled up beside her mother's couch, talking out unreservedly all her grief, and anger, and perplexity.

Mrs. Raeburn, delicate and invalided as she was, had nevertheless a great deal of influence, though perhaps neither Raeburn, nor Erica, nor warm-hearted Tom Craigie, understood how much she did for them all. She was so unassuming, so little given to unnecessary speech, so reticent, that her life made very little show, while it had become so entirely a matter of course that everyone should bring his private troubles to her that it would have seemed extraordinary not to meet with exactly the sympathy and counsel needed. To-day, however, even Mrs. Raeburn was almost too despondent to cheer the others. It comforted Erica to talk to her, but she could not help feeling very miserable as she saw the anxiety and sadness in her mother's face.

'What more can we do, mother?' she questioned. 'I can't think of a single thing we can give up.'

'I really don't know, dear,' said her mother, with a sigh. 'We have nothing but the absolute necessaries of life now, except indeed your education at the High School, and that is a very trifling expense, and one which cannot be interfered with.'

Erica was easily depressed, like most high-spirited persons; but she was not used to seeing either her father or her mother despondent, and the mere strangeness kept her from going down to the very deepest depths. She had the feeling that at least one of them must try to keep up. Yet, do what she would, that evening was one of the saddest and dreariest she had ever spent. All the excitement of contest was over, and a sort of dead weight of gloom seemed to oppress them. Raeburn was absolutely silent. From the first Erica had never heard him complain, but his anger, and afterwards his intense depression, spoke volumes. Even Tom, her friend and playfellow, seemed changed this

evening, grown somehow from a boy to a man; for there was a sternness about him which she had never seen before, and which made the days of their childhood seem far away. And yet it was not so very long ago that she and Tom had been the most light-hearted and careless beings in the world, and had imagined the chief interest of life to consist in tending dormice, and tame rats, and silkworms! She wondered whether they could ever feel free again, whether they could ever enjoy their long Saturday afternoon rambles, or whether this weight of care would always be upon them.

With a very heavy heart she prepared her lessons for the next day, finding it somewhat hard to take much interest in Magna Charta and legal enactments in the time of King John, when the legal enactments of to-day were so much more mind-engrossing. Tom was sitting opposite to her writing letters for Raeburn. Once, notwithstanding his grave looks, she hazarded a question.

'Tom,' she said, shutting up her 'History

of the English People,' 'Tom, what do you think will happen?'

Tom looked across at her with angry yet sorrowful eyes.

'I think,' he said, sternly, 'that the chieftain will try to do the work of ten men at once, and will pay off these debts or die in the attempt.'

The 'chieftain' was a favourite name among the Raeburnites for their leader, and there was a great deal of the clan feeling among them. The majority of them were earnest, hard-working, thoughtful men, and their society was both powerful and well-organised, while their personal devotion to Raeburn lent a vigour and vitality to the whole body which might otherwise have been lacking. Perhaps comparatively few would have been enthusiastic for the cause of atheism had not that cause been represented by a high-souled, self-denying man whom they loved with all their hearts.

The dreary evening ended at length, Erica helped her mother to bed, and then with slow

steps climbed up to her little attic room. It was cold and comfortless enough, bare of all luxuries, but even here the walls were lined with books, and Erica's little iron bedstead looked somewhat incongruous, surrounded as it was with dingy-looking volumes, dusty old legal books, works of reference, books atheistical, theological, metaphysical, or scientific. On one shelf amid this strangely heterogeneous collection she kept her own particular treasures —Brian's Longfellow, one or two of Dickens' books which Tom had given her, and the beloved old Grimm and Hans Andersen, which had been the friends of her childhood, and which for 'old sakes' sake' she had never had the heart to sell. The only other trace of her in the strange little bed-room was in a wonderful array of china animals on the mantelpiece. She was a great animal-lover, and, being a favourite with everyone, she received many votive offerings. Her shrine was an amusing one to look at. A green china frog played a tuneless guitar; a pensive monkey gazed with clasped hands and dreadfully human eyes into futurity;

there were sagacious-looking elephants, placid rhinoceroses, rampant hares, two pug dogs clasped in an irrevocable embrace, an enormous lobster, a diminutive polar bear, and in the centre of all a most evil-looking jackdaw about half-an-inch high.

But to-night the childish side of Erica was in abeyance; the cares of womanhood seemed gathering upon her. She put out her candle and sat down in the dark, racking her brain for some plan by which to relieve her father and mother. Their life was growing harder and harder. It seemed to her that poverty in itself was bearable enough, but that the ever-increasing load of debt was not bearable. As long as she could remember, it had always been like a mill-stone tied about their necks, and the ceaseless petty economies and privations seemed of little avail; she felt very much as if she were one of the Danaids, doomed for ever to pour water into a vessel with a hole in it.

Yet in one sense she was better off than many, for these debts were not selfish debts—no one had ever known Raeburn to spend an unneces-

sary sixpence on himself; all this load had been incurred in the defence of what he considered the truth—by his unceasing struggles for liberty. She was proud of the debts, proud to suffer in what she regarded as the sacred cause; but in spite of that she was almost in despair this evening, the future looked so hopelessly black.

Tom's words rang in her head—'The chieftain will try to do the work of ten men!' What if he overworked himself as he had done once a few years ago? What if he died in the attempt? She wished Tom had not spoken so strongly. In the friendly darkness she did not try to check the tears which would come into her eyes at the thought. Something must be done! She must in some way help him! And then, all at once, there flashed into her mind Monsieur Noirol's teasing suggestion that she should go to Paris. Here was a way in which, free of all expense, she might finish her education, might practically earn her living! In this way she might indeed help to lighten the load, but it would be at the cost of absolute self-sacrifice. She must leave home, and father and mother, and country!

Erica was not exactly selfish but she was very young. For a time the thought of the voluntary sacrifice seemed quite unbearable, she could not make up her mind to it.

'Why should I give up all this! Why should prejudice and bigotry spoil my whole life?' she thought, beginning to pace up and down the room with quick agitated steps. 'Why should we suffer because that wretch has gone bankrupt? It is unfair, unjust, it can't be right.'

She leant her arms on the window-sill, and looked out into the silent night. The stars were shining peacefully enough, looking down on this world of strife and struggle; Erica grew a little calmer as she looked; Nature, with its majesty of calmness, seemed to quiet her troubled heart and 'sweep gradual gospels in.'

From some recess of memory there came to her some half-enigmatical words; they had been quoted by Charles Osmond in his speech, but she did not remember where she had heard them, only they began to ring in her ears now:

'There is no gain except by loss,
There is no life except by death,

. . . . .

Nor glory but by bearing shame,
Nor justice but by taking blame.'

She did not altogether understand the verse, but there was a truth in it which could hardly fail to come home to one who knew what persecution meant. What if the very blame and injustice of the present brought in the future reign of justice! She seemed to hear her father's voice saying again,

'We must bear up, child; injustice won't triumph in the end.'

'There is no gain except by loss!'

What if her loss of home and friends brought gain to the world! That was a thought which brought a glow of happiness to her even in the midst of her pain. There was, after all, much of the highest Christianity about her, though she would have been very much vexed if anyone had told her so, because Christianity meant to her narrow-mindedness instead of brotherly love. However it might be, there was no

denying that the child of the great teacher of atheism had grasped the true meaning of life, had grasped it, and was prepared to act on it too. She had always lived with those who were ready to spend all in the promotion of the general good; and all that was true, all that was noble in her creed, all that had filled her with admiration in the lives of those she loved, came to her aid now.

She went softly down the dark staircase to Raeburn's study; it was late, and, anxious not to disturb the rest of the house, she opened the door noiselessly and crept in. Her father was sitting at his desk writing; he looked very stern, but there was a sort of grandeur about his rugged face. He was absorbed in his work and did not hear her, and for a minute she stood quite still watching him, realising with pain and yet with a happy pride how greatly she loved him. Her heart beat fast at the thought of helping him, lightening his load even a little.

'Father,' she said, softly.

Raeburn was the sort of man who could not

be startled, but he looked up quickly, apparently returning from some speculative region with a slight effort. He was the most practical of men, and yet for a minute he felt as if he were living in a dream, for Erica stood beside him, pale and beautiful, with a sort of heroic light about her whole face which transformed her from a merry child to a high-souled woman. Instinctively he rose to speak to her.

'I will not disturb you for more than a minute, father,' she said, 'it is only that I have thought of a way in which I think I could help you if you would let me.'

'Well, dear, what is it?' said Raeburn, still watching half-dreamily the exceeding beauty of the face before him. Yet an undefined sense of dread chilled his heart. Was anything too hard or high for her to propose? He listened without a word to her account of Monsieur Noirol's Parisian scheme, to her voluntary suggestion that she should go into exile for two years. At the end he merely put a brief question.

'Are you ready to bear two years of loneliness?'

'I am ready to help you,' she said, with a little quiver in her voice and a cloud of pain in her eyes.

Raeburn turned away from her and began to pace up and down the little room, his eyes not altogether free from tears, for, pachydermatous as he was accounted by his enemies, this man was very tender over his child, he could hardly endure to see her pain. Yet after all, though she had given him a sharp pang, she had brought him happiness which any father might envy. He came back to her, his stern face inexpressibly softened.

'And I am ready to be helped, my child; it shall be as you say.'

There was something in his voice and in the gentle acceptance of help from one so strong and self-reliant which touched Erica more than any praise or demonstrative thanks could have done. They were going to work together, he had promised that she should fight side by side with him.

'Law-suits may ruin us,' said Raeburn, 'but, after all, the evil has a way of helping out the good.' He put his arm round her and kissed her. 'You have taught me, little one, how powerless and weak are these petty persecutions. They can only prick and sting us! Nothing can really hurt us while we love the truth and love each other.'

That was the happiest moment Erica had ever known, already her loss had brought a rapturous gain.

'I shall never go to sleep to-night,' she said. 'Let me help you with your letters.'

Raeburn demurred a little, but yielded to her entreaties, and for the next two hours the father and daughter worked in silence. The bitterness which had lurked in the earlier part of the pamphlet that Raeburn had in hand was quite lacking in its close; the writer had somehow been lifted into a higher, purer atmosphere, and if his pen flew less rapidly over the paper, it at any rate wrote words which would long outlive the mere overflow of an angry heart.

Coming back to the world of realities at last somewhere in the small hours, he found his fire out, a goodly pile of letters ready for his signature, and his little amanuensis fast asleep in her chair. Reproaching himself for having allowed her to sit up, he took her in his strong arms as though she had been a mere baby, and carried her up to her room so gently that she never woke. The next morning she found herself so swathed in plaids and rugs and blankets that she could hardly move, and, in spite of a bad headache, could not help beginning the day with a hearty laugh.

Raeburn was not a man who ever let the grass grow under his feet, his decisions were made with thought, but with very rapid thought, and his action was always prompt. His case excited a good deal of attention; but long before the newspapers had ceased to wage war either for or against him, long before the weekly journals had ceased to team with letters relating to the law-suit, he had formed his plans for the future. His home was to be completely broken up, Erica was to go to Paris, his wife

was to live with his sister, Mrs. Craigie, and her son Tom, who had agreed to keep on the lodgings in Guilford Terrace, while for himself he had mapped out such a programme of work as could only have been undertaken by a man of 'Titanic energy' and 'Herculean strength,' epithets which even the hostile press invariably bestowed on him. How great the sacrifice was to him few people knew. As we have said before, the world regarded him as a target, and would hardly have believed that he was in reality a man of the gentlest tastes, as fond of his home as any man in England, a faithful friend and a devoted father, and perhaps all the more dependent on the sympathies of his own circle because of the bitter hostility he encountered from other quarters. But he made his plans resolutely, and said very little about them either one way or the other, sometimes even checking Erica when she grumbled for him, or gave vent to her indignation with regard to the defendant.

'We work for freedom, little one,' he used to

say; 'and it is an honour to suffer in the cause of liberty.'

'But everyone says you will kill yourself with overwork,' said Erica, 'and especially when you are in America.'

'They don't know what stuff I'm made of,' said Raeburn; 'and, even if it should use me up, what then? It's better to wear out than to rust out, as a wise man once remarked.'

'Yes,' said Erica, rather faintly.

'But I've no intention of wearing out just yet,' said Raeburn, cheerfully. 'You need not be afraid, little son Eric; and, if at the end of these two years you do come back to find me grey and wrinkled, what will that matter so long as we are free once more. There's a good time coming: we'll have the cosiest little home in London yet.'

'With a garden for you to work in,' said Erica, brightening up like a child at the castle in the air. 'And we'll keep lots of animals, and never bother again about money all our lives.'

Raeburn smiled at her ideas of felicity—no cares, and plenty of dogs and cats! He did not anticipate any haven of rest at the end of the two years for himself. He knew that his life must be a series of conflicts to the very end. Still he hoped for relief from the load of debt, and looked forward to the re-establishment of his home.

Brian Osmond heard of the plans before long, but he scarcely saw Erica; the Christmas holidays began, and he no longer met her each afternoon in Gower Street, while the time drew nearer and nearer for her departure for Paris. At length, on the very last day, it chanced that they were once more thrown together.

Raeburn was a great lover of flowers, and he very often received floral offerings from his followers. It so happened that some beautiful hot-house flowers had been sent to him from a nursery garden one day in January, and, unwilling to keep them all, he had suggested that Erica should take some to the neighbouring hospitals. Now there were two hospitals in Guilford Square; Erica felt much more interested

in the children's hospital than in the one for grown-up people; but, wishing to be impartial, she arranged a basketful for each, and well-pleased to have anything to give, hastened on her errand. Much to her delight, her first basket of flowers was not only accepted very gratefully, but the lady superintendent took her over the hospital, and let her distribute the flowers among the children. She was very fond of children, and was as happy as she could be passing up and down among the little beds, while her bright manner attracted the little ones, and made them unusually affectionate and responsive.

Happy at having been able to give them pleasure, and full of tender womanly thoughts, she crossed the square to another small hospital; she was absorbed in pitiful loving humanity, had forgotten altogether that the world counted her as a heretic, and, wholly unprepared for what awaited her, she was shown into the visitors' room and asked to give her name. Not only was Raeburn too notorious a name to pass muster, but the head of the hospital knew

Erica by sight, and had often met her out of doors with her father. She was a stiff, narrow-minded, uncompromising sort of person, and in her own words was 'determined to have no fellowship with the works of darkness.' How she could consider bright-faced Erica, with her loving thought for others and her free gift, a 'work of darkness,' it is hard to understand. She was not at all disposed, however, to be under any sort of obligation to an atheist, and the result of it was that, after a three minutes' interview, Erica found herself once more in the square, with her flowers still in her hand, 'declined *without* thanks.'

No one ever quite knew what the superintendent had said to her, but apparently the rebuff had been very hard to bear. Not content with declining any fellowship with the poor little 'work of darkness,' she had gone on in accordance with the letter of the text to reprove her; and Erica left the house with burning cheeks, and with a tumult of angry feeling stirred up in her heart. She was far too angry to know or care what she was doing; she walk-

ed down the quiet square in the very opposite direction to 'Persecution Alley,' and might have walked on for an indefinite time had not some one stopped her.

'I was hoping to see you before you left,' said a pleasant, quiet voice close by her. She looked up, and saw Charles Osmond.

Thus suddenly brought to a standstill, she became aware that she was trembling from head to foot. A little delicate sensitive thing, the unsparing censure and the rude reception she had just met with had quite upset her.

Charles Osmond retained her hand in his strong clasp, and looked questioningly into her bright, indignant eyes.

'What is the matter my child?' he asked.

'I am only angry,' said Erica, rather breathlessly, 'hurt and angry, because one of your bigots has been rude to me.'

'Come in, and tell me all about it,' said Charles Osmond; and there was something so irresistible in his manner that Erica at once allowed herself to be led into one of the tall, old-fashioned houses and taken into a comfort-

able and roomy study, the nicest room she had ever been in. It was not luxurious, indeed, the Turkey carpet was shabby and the furniture well-worn, but it was homelike, and warm and cheerful, evidently a room which was dear to its owner.

Charles Osmond made her sit down in a capacious arm-chair close to the fire.

'Well, now, who was the bigot?' he said, in a voice that would have won the confidence of a flint.

Erica told as much of the story as she could bring herself to repeat, quite enough to show Charles Osmond the terrible harm which may be wrought by tactless modern Christianity. He looked down very sorrowfully at the eager expressive face of the speaker, it was at once very white and very pink, for the child was sorely wounded as well as indignant. She was evidently, however, a little vexed with herself for feeling the insult so keenly.

'It is very stupid of me,' she said, laughing a little, 'it is time I was used to it, but I never can help shaking in this silly way when any-

one is rude to us. Tom laughs at me, and says I am made on wire springs like a twelfth-cake butterfly! But it is rather hard, isn't it, to be shut out from everything, even from giving?'

'I think it is both hard and wrong,' said Charles Osmond. 'But we do not all shut you out.'

'No,' said Erica. 'You have always been kind, you are not a bit like a Christian. Would you,'—she hesitated a little,—'would you take the flowers instead?'

It was said with a shy grace inexpressibly winning. Charles Osmond was touched and gratified.

'They will be a great treat to us,' he said. 'My mother is very fond of flowers. Will you come upstairs and see her? We shall find afternoon tea going on, I expect.'

So the rejected flowers found a resting-place in the clergyman's house, and Brian coming in from his rounds was greeted by a sight which made his heart beat at double time. In the drawing-room beside his grandmother sat

Erica, her little fur hat pushed back, her gloves off, busily arranging Christmas roses and red camellias. Her anger had died away, she was talking quite merrily. It seemed to Brian more like a beautiful dream than a bit of every-day life, to have her sitting there so naturally in his home; but the note of pain was struck before long.

'I must go home,' she said. 'This is my last day, you know. I am going to Paris to-morrow.'

A sort of sadness seemed to fall on them at the words, only gentle Mrs. Osmond said, cheerfully,

'You will come to see us again when you come back, will you not?'

And then with the privilege of the aged she drew down the young fresh face to hers and kissed it.

'You will let me see you home,' said Brian. 'It is getting dark.'

Erica laughingly protested that she was well used to taking care of herself, but it ended in Brian's triumphing. So together they crossed

the quiet square. Erica chattered away merrily enough, but as they reached the narrow entrance to Guilford Terrace a shadow stole over her face.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'this is the last time I shall come home for two whole years.'

'You go for so long?' said Brian, stifling a sigh. 'You won't forget your English friends.'

'Do you mean that you count yourself our friend?' asked Erica, smiling.

'If you will let me.'

'That is a funny word to use,' she replied, laughing. 'You see, we are treated as outlaws generally. I don't think anyone ever said "will you let" to me before. This is our house; thank you for seeing me home.' Then, with a roguish look in her eyes, she added, demurely, but with a slight emphasis on the last word, 'Good-bye, my friend.'

Brian turned away sadly enough, but he had not gone far when he heard flying footsteps, and looking back saw Erica once more.

'Oh, I just came to know whether by any chance you want a kitten,' she said, 'I have a

real beauty which I want to find a nice home for.'

Of course Brian wanted a kitten at once; one would have imagined by the eagerness of his manner that he was devoted to the whole feline tribe.

'Well, then, will you come in and see it,' said Erica. 'He really is a very nice kitten, and I shall go away much happier if I can see him settled in life first.'

She took him in, introduced him to her mother, and ran off in search of the cat, returning in a few minutes with a very playful-looking tabby.

'There he is,' she said, putting the kitten on the table with an air of pride. 'I don't believe he has an equal in all London.'

'What do you call him?' asked Brian.

'His name is St. Anthony,' said Erica. 'Oh, I hope, by-the-by, you won't object to that, it was no disrespect to St. Anthony at all, but only that he always will go and preach to my gold fish. We'll make him do it now to show you. Come along, Tony, and give them a sermon, there's a good little kit!'

She put him on a side table, and he at once rested his front paws on a large glass bowl and peered down at the gold fish with great curiosity.

'I believe he would have drowned himself sooner or later, like Gray's cat, so I daresay it is a good thing for him to leave. You will be kind to him, won't you?'

Brian promised that he should be well attended to, and indeed there was little doubt that St. Anthony would from that day forth be lapped in luxury. He went away with his new master very contentedly, Erica following them to the door with farewell injunctions.

'And you'll be sure to butter his feet well, or else he won't stay with you. Good-bye, dear Tony. Be a good little cat!'

Brian was pleased to have this token from his Undine, but at the same time he could not help seeing that she cared much more about parting with the kitten than about saying good-bye to him. Well, it was something to have that lucky St. Anthony, who had been fondled and kissed. And after all it was Erica's very child-

ishness and simplicity which made her so dear to him.

As soon as they were out of sight, Erica, with the thought of the separation beginning to weigh upon her, went back to her mother. They knew that this was the last quiet time they should have together for many long months. But last days are not good days for talking. They spoke very little. Every now and then Mrs. Raeburn would make some inquiry about the packing or the journey, or would try to cheer the child by speaking of the home they would have at the end of the two years. But Erica was not to be comforted, a dull pain was gnawing at her heart, and the present was not to be displaced by any visions of a golden future.

'If it were not for leaving you alone, mother, I shouldn't mind so much,' she said, in rather a choked voice. 'But it seems to me that you have the hardest part of all.'

'Aunt Jean will be here, and Tom,' said Mrs. Raeburn.

'Aunt Jean is very kind,' said Erica, doubt-

fully. 'But she doesn't know how to nurse people. Tom is the one hope, and he has promised always to tell me the whole truth about you; so, if you get worse, I shall come home directly.'

'You mustn't grudge me my share of the work,' said Mrs. Raeburn. 'It would make me very miserable if I did hinder you or your father.'

Erica sighed.

'You and father are so dreadfully public spirited! And yet, oh, mother! what does the whole world matter to me if I think you are uncomfortable, and wretched, and alone?'

'You will learn to think differently, dear, by-and-by,' said her mother, kissing the eager troubled face. 'And, when you fancy me lonely, you can picture me instead as proud and happy in thinking of my brave little daughter who has gone into exile of her own accord to help the cause of truth and liberty.'

They were inspiriting words, and they brought a glow to Erica's face; she choked down her own personal pain. No religious

martyr went through the time of trial more bravely than Luke Raeburn's daughter lived through the next four-and-twenty hours. She never forgot even the most trivial incident of that day, it seemed burnt in upon her brain. The dreary waking on the dark winter morning, the hurried farewells to her aunt and Tom, the last long embrace from her mother, the drive to the station, her father's recognition on the platform, the rude staring and ruder comments to which they were subjected, then the one supreme wrench of parting, the look of pain in her father's face, the trembling of his voice, the last long look as the train moved off, and the utter loneliness of all that followed. Then came dimmer recollections, not less real but more confused, of a merry set of fellow-passengers who were going to enjoy themselves in the South of France; of a certain little packet which her father had placed in her hand, and which proved to be 'Mill on Liberty'; of her eager perusal of the first two or three chapters; of the many instances of the 'tyranny of the majority' which she had been able to produce not without

a certain satisfaction. And afterwards more vividly she could recall the last look at England, the dreary arrival at Boulogne, the long, weary railway journey, and the friendly reception at Madame Lemercier's school. No one could deny that her new life had been bravely begun.

CHAPTER VI.

PARIS.

But we wake in the young morning when the light is breaking forth;
And look out on its misty gleams, as if the noon were full;
And the Infinite around, seems but a larger kind of earth
Ensphering this, and measured by the self-same handy rule.
Hilda among the Broken Gods.

Not unfrequently the most important years of a life, the years which tell most on the character, are unmarked by any notable events. A steady, orderly routine, a gradual progression, perseverance in hard work, often do more to educate and form than a varied and eventful life. Erica's two years of exile were as monotonous and quiet as the life of the secularist's daughter could possibly be. There came to her, of

course, from the distance the echoes of her father's strife; but she was far removed from it all, and there was little to disturb her mind in the quiet Parisian school. There is no need to dwell on her uneventful life, and a very brief description of her surroundings will be sufficient to show the sort of atmosphere in which she lived.

The school was a large one, and consisted principally of French provincial girls, sent to Paris to finish their education. Some of them Erica liked exceedingly; every one of them was to her a curious and interesting study. She liked to hear them talk about their home life, and, above all things, to hear their simple, naïve remarks about religion. Of course she was on her honour not to enter into discussions with them, and they regarded all English as heretics, and did not trouble themselves to distinguish between the different grades. But there was nothing to prevent her from observing and listening, and with some wonder she used to hear discussions about the dresses for the 'Première Communion,' remarks about the various services,

or laments over the confession papers. The girls went to confession once a month, and there was always a day in which they had to prepare and write out their misdemeanours. One day, a little, thin, delicate child from the South of France came up to Erica with her confession in her hand.

'Dear, good Erica,' she said, wearily, 'have the kindness to read this, and to correct my mistakes.'

Erica took the little thing on her knee and began to read the paper. It was curiously spelt. Before very long she came to the sentence, 'J'ai trop mangé.'

'Why, Ninette,' exclaimed Erica, 'you hardly eat enough to feed a sparrow; it is nonsense to put that.'

'Ah, but it was a fast day,' sighed Ninette. 'And I felt hungry, and did really eat more than I need have.'

Erica felt half angry and contemptuous, half amused, and could only hope that the priest would see the pale, thin face of the little penitent and realise the ludicrousness of the confession.

Another time all the girls had been to some special service; on their return she asked what it had been about.

'Oh,' remarked a bright-faced girl, 'it was about the seven joys—or the seven sorrows—of Mary.'

'Do you mean to say you don't know whether it was very solemn or very joyful?' asked Erica, astonished and amused.

'I am really not sure,' said the girl, with the most placid good-tempered indifference.

On the whole, it was scarcely to be wondered at that Erica was not favourably impressed with Roman Catholicism.

She was a great favourite with all the girls; but, though she was very patient and persevering, she did not succeed in making any of them fluent English speakers, and learnt their language far better than they learnt hers. Her three special friends were not among the pupils, but among the teachers. Dear old Madame Lemercier with her good-humoured black eyes, her kind demonstrative ways, and her delightful stories about the time of the war and the siege, was a friend worth having. So was

her husband, Monsieur Lemercier the journalist. He was a little dried-up man, with a fierce black moustache; he was sarcastic and witty, and he would talk politics by the hour together to anyone who would listen to him, especially if they would now and then ask a pertinent and intelligent question which gave him scope for an oration.

Erica made a delightful listener for she was always anxious to learn and to understand, and before long she was quite *au fait*, and understood a great deal about that exceedingly complicated thing, the French political system. Monsieur Lemercier was a fiery, earnest little man with very strong convictions; he had been exiled as a Communist but had now returned, and was a very vigorous and impassioned writer in one of the advanced Republican journals. He and his wife became very fond of Erica, Madame Lemercier loving her for her brightness and readiness to help, and monsieur for her beauty and her quickness of perception. It was surprising and gratifying to meet with a girl who, without being a *femme savante*, was yet capable

of understanding the difference between the Extreme Left and the Left Centre, and who took a real interest in what was passing in the world.

But Erica's greatest friend was a certain Fraulein Sonnenthal, the German governess. She was a kind-eyed Hanoverian, homely and by no means brilliantly clever, but there was something in her unselfishness and in her unassuming humility that won Erica's heart. She never would hear a word against the Fraulein.

'Why do you care so much for Fraulein Sonnenthal?' she was often asked. 'She seems uninteresting and dull to us.'

'I love her because she is so good,' was Erica's invariable reply.

She and the Fraulein shared a bed-room, and many were the arguments they had together. The effect of being separated from her own people was, very naturally, to make Erica a more devoted Secularist. She was exceedingly enthusiastic for what she considered the truth, and not unfrequently grieved and shocked the Lutheran Fraulein by the vehemence of her

statements. Very often they would argue far on into the night; they never quarrelled, however hot the dispute, but the fraulein often had a sore time of it; for, naturally, Luke Raeburn's daughter was well-up in all the debateable points, and she had, moreover, a good deal of her father's rapidity of thought and gift of speech. She was always generous, however, and the Fraulein had in some respects the advantage of her, for they spoke in German.

One scene in that little bed-room Erica never forgot. They had gone to bed one Easter-eve, and had somehow fallen into a long and stormy argument about the resurrection and the doctrine of immortality. Erica, perhaps because she was conscious of the 'weakness' she had confessed to Brian Osmond, argued very warmly on the other side; the poor little Fraulein was grieved beyond measure, and defended her faith gallantly, though as she feared very ineffectually. Her arguments seemed altogether extinguished by Erica's remorseless logic, she was not nearly so clever, and her very earnestness seemed to trip her up and make all her sen-

tences broken and incomplete. They discussed the subject till Erica was hoarse, and at last from very weariness she fell asleep while the Lutheran was giving her a long quotation from St. Paul.

She slept for two or three hours; when she woke, the room was flooded with silvery moonlight, the wooden cross which hung over the German's bed stood out black and distinct, but the bed was empty. Erica looked round the room uneasily, and saw a sight which she never forgot.

The Fraulein was kneeling beside the window, and even the cold moonlight could not chill or hide the wonderful brightness of her face. She was a plain, ordinary little woman, but her face was absolutely transformed; there was something so beautiful and yet so unusual in her expression that Erica could not speak or move, but lay watching her almost breathlessly. The spiritual world about which they had been speaking must be very real indeed to Thekla Sonnenthal! Was it possible that this was the work of delusion? While she mused, her friend rose, came straight to her bedside, and

bent over her with a look of such love and tenderness that Erica, though not generally demonstrative could not resist throwing her arms round her neck.

'Dear Sunnyvale! you look just like your name!' she exclaimed, 'all brightness and humility! What have you been doing to grow so like Murillo's Madonna?'

'I thought you were asleep,' said the Fraulein. 'Good night, *herzblättchen*, or rather good morning, for the Easter Day has begun.'

Perhaps Erica liked her all the better for saying nothing more definite, but in the ordinary sense of the word she did not have a good night, for long after Thekla Sonnenthal was asleep, and dreaming of her German home, Luke Raeburn's daughter lay awake, thinking of the faith which to some was such an intense reality. Had there been anything excited or unreal about her companion's manner, she would not have thought twice about it, but her tranquillity and sweetness seemed to her very remarkable. Moreover, Fraulein Sonnenthal

was strangely devoid of imagination; she was a matter-of-fact little person, not at all a likely subject for visions and delusions. Erica was perplexed. Once more there came to her that uncomfortable question,—'Supposing Christianity were true?'

The moonlight paled and the Easter morn broke, and still she tossed to and fro haunted by doubts which would not let her sleep. But by-and-by she returned to the one thing which was absolutely certain, namely that her German friend was loveable and to be loved, whatever her creed.

And, since Erica's love was of the practical order, it prompted her to get up early, dress noiselessly, and steal out of the room without waking her companion; then, with all the church bells ringing and the devout citizens hurrying to mass, she ran to the nearest flower-stall, spent one of her very few half-francs on the loveliest white rose to be had, and carried it back as an Easter offering to the Fraulein.

It was fortunate in every way that Erica had the little German lady for her friend, for

she would often have fared badly without some one to nurse and befriend her.

She was very delicate, and worked far too hard; for, besides all her work in the school, she was preparing for an English examination which she had set her heart on trying as soon as she went home. Had it not been for Fraulein Sonnenthal, she would more than once have thoroughly overworked herself; and indeed as it was, the strain of that two years told severely on her strength.

But the time wore on rapidly, as very fully occupied time always does, and Erica's list of days grew shorter and shorter, and the letters from her mother were more and more full of plans for the life they would lead when she came home. The two years would actually end in January; Erica was however to stay in Paris till the following Easter, partly to oblige Madame Lemercier, partly because by that time her father hoped to be in a great measure free from his embarrassments, able once more to make a home for her.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT THE NEW YEAR BROUGHT.

A voice grows with the growing years;
Earth, hushing down her bitter cry,
Looks upward from her graves, and hears,
'The Resurrection and the Life am I.'

O Love Divine,—whose constant beam
Shines on the eyes that will not see,
And waits to bless us, while we dream
Thou leavest us because we turn from Thee!

Nor bounds, nor clime, nor creed Thou know'st,
Wide as our need Thy favours fall;
The white wings of the Holy Ghost
Stoop, seen or unseen, o'er the heads of all.

WHITTIER.

IT was the eve of the New Year, and great excitement prevailed in the Lemerciers' house. Many of the girls whose homes were at a distance had remained at school for the short

winter holiday, and on this particular afternoon a number of them were clustered round the stove talking about the festivities of the morrow and the presents they were likely to have.

Erica, who was now a tall and very pretty girl of eighteen, was sitting on the hearthrug with Ninette on her lap; she was in very high spirits and kept the little group in perpetual laughter, so much so indeed that Fraulein Sonnenthal had more than once been obliged to interfere, and do her best to quiet them.

'How wild thou art, dear Erica!' she exclaimed. 'What is it?'

'I am happy, that is all,' said Erica. 'You would be happy if the year of freedom were just dawning for you. Three months more and I shall be home!'

She was like a child in her exultant happiness, far more child-like, indeed, than the grave little Ninette whom she was nursing.

'Thou art not dignified enough for a teacher,' said the Fraulein, laughingly.

'She is no teacher,' cried the girls. 'It is

holiday time, and she need not talk that frightful English.'

Erica made a laughing defence of her native tongue, and such a babel ensued that the Fraulein had to interfere again.

'Liebe Erica! Thou art beside thyself. What has come to thee?'

'Only joy, dear Thekla, at the thought of the beautiful New Year which is coming,' cried Erica. 'Father would say I was "fey," and should pay for all this fun with a bad headache or some misfortune. Come, give me the French "David Copperfield," and let me read you how "Barkis veut bien' and "Mrs. Gummidge a pensé de l'ancien."'

The reading was more exquisitely ludicrous to Erica herself than to her hearers. Still the wit of Charles Dickens, even when translated, called forth peals of laughter from the French girls, too. It was the brightest happiest little group imaginable; perhaps it was scarcely wonderful that old Madame Lemercier, when she came to break it up, should find her eyes dim with tears.

'My dear Erica——' she said, and broke-off abruptly.

Erica looked up with laughing eyes.

'Don't scold, dear madame,' she said, coaxingly. 'We have been very noisy; but it is New Year's Eve, and we are so happy.'

'Dear child, it is not that,' said madame. 'I want to speak to you for a minute; come with me, *chérie*.'

Still Erica noticed nothing; did not detect the tone of pity, did not wonder at the terms of endearment which were generally reserved for more private use. She followed madame into the hall, still chattering gaily.

'The "David Copperfield" is for monsieur's present to-morrow,' she said, laughingly. 'I knew he was too lazy to read it in English, so I got him a translation.'

'My dear,' said madame, taking her hand, 'try to be quiet a moment. I—I have something to tell you. My poor little one, monsieur your father is arrived——'

'Father! father here!' exclaimed Erica, in a transport of delight. 'Where is he, where?'

Oh, madame, why didn't you tell me sooner?'

Madame Lemercier tried in vain to detain her, as with cheeks all glowing with happiness and dancing eyes, she ran at full speed to the salon.

'Father!' she cried, throwing open the door and running to meet him. Then suddenly she stood quite still as if petrified.

Beside the crackling wood fire, his arms on the chimney-piece, his face hidden, stood a grey-haired man. He raised himself as she spoke. His news was in his face, it was written all too plainly there.

'Father!' gasped Erica, in a voice which seemed altogether different from the first exclamation, almost as if it belonged to a different person.

Raeburn took her in his arms.

'My child—my poor little Eric,' he said.

She did not speak a word, but clung to him as though to keep herself from falling. In one instant it seemed as though her whole world had been wrecked, her life shattered. She could not even realise that her father was

still left to her, except in so far as the mere bodily support was concerned. He was strong; she clung to him as in a hurricane she would have clung to a rock.

'Say it,' she gasped, after a timeless silence perhaps of minutes, perhaps of hours, it might have been centuries for aught she knew. 'Say it in words.'

She wanted to know everything, wanted to reduce this huge, overwhelming sorrow to something intelligible. Surely in words it would not be so awful—so limitless.

And he said it, speaking in a low repressed voice, yet very tenderly, as if she had been a little child. She made a great effort to listen, but the sentences only came to her disjointedly, and as if from a great distance. It had been very sudden—a two hours' illness, no very great suffering. He had been lecturing at Birmingham—had been telegraphed for—had been too late.

Erica made a desperate effort to realise it all; at last she brought down the measureless agony to actual words, repeating them over and over to herself—'Mother is dead.'

At length she had grasped the idea! Her heart seemed to die within her, a strange blue shade passed over her face, her limbs stiffened. She felt her father carry her to the window, was perfectly conscious of everything, watched as in a dream whilst he wrenched open the clumsy fastening of the casement, heard the voices in the street below, heard too in the distance the sound of church bells, was vaguely conscious of relief as the cold air blew upon her.

She was lying on a couch, and, if left to herself, might have lain there for hours in that strange state of absolute prostration. But she was not alone, and gradually she realised it. Very slowly the re-beginning of life set in, the consciousness of her father's presence awakened her as it were from her dream of unmitigated pain. She sat up, put her arms round his neck and kissed him ; then for a minute let her aching head rest on his shoulder. Presently, in a low but steady voice, she said,

'What would you like me to do, father?'

'To come home with me now if you are able,' he said; 'to-morrow morning, though, if you would rather wait, dear.'

But the idea of waiting seemed intolerable to her. The very sound of the word was hateful. Had she not waited two weary years, and this was the end of it all? Any action, any present doing however painful, but no more waiting! No terrible pause in which more thoughts and, therefore, more pain might grow. Outside in the passage they met Madame Lemercier, and presently Erica found herself surrounded by kind helpers, wondering to find them all so tearful when her own eyes felt so hot and dry. They were very good to her; but, separated from her father, her sorrow again completely overwhelmed her, she could not then feel the slightest gratitude to them or the slightest comfort from their sympathy. She lay motionless on her little white bed, her eyes fixed on the wooden cross on the opposite wall, or from time to time glancing at Fraulein Sonnenthal, who, with little Ninette to help, was busily packing her trunk. And all the while she said again and again the words which summed up her sorrow,

'Mother is dead! Mother is dead!'

After a time her eyes fell on her elaborately-drawn paper of days. Every evening since her first arrival she had gone through the almost religious ceremony of marking-off the day; it had often been a great consolation to her. The paper was much worn; the weeks and days yet to be marked were few in number. She looked at it now, and if there can be a 'more' to absolute grief, an additional pang to unmitigated sorrow, it came to her at the sight of that visible record of her long exile. She snatched down the paper and tore it to pieces; then sank back again, pale and breathless. Fraulein Sonnenthal saw and understood. She came to her, and kissed her.

'Herzblättchen,' she said, almost in a whisper, and, after a moment's pause, 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott.'

Erica made an impatient gesture, and turned away her head.

'Why does she choose this time of all others to tell me so,' she thought to herself. 'Now, when I can't argue or even think! A sure tower! Could a delusion make one feel that

anything is sure but death at such a time as this! Everything is gone—or going. Mother is dead!—mother is dead! Yet she meant to be be kind, poor Thekla, she didn't know it would hurt.'

Madame Lemercier came into the room with a cup of coffee and a *brioche*.

'You have a long journey before you, my little one,' she said; 'you must take this before you start.'

Yes, there was the journey! that was a comfort. There was something to be done, something hard and tiring—surely it would blunt her perceptions! She started up with a strange sort of energy, put on her hat and cloak, swallowed the food with an effort, helped to lock her trunk, moved rapidly about the room, looking for any chance possession which might have been left out. There was such terrible anguish in her tearless eyes that little Ninette shrank away from her in alarm. Madame Lemercier, who in the time of the siege had seen great suffering, had never seen anything like this; even Thekla Sonnenthal realised that for the

time she was beyond the reach of human comfort.

Before long the farewells were over. Erica was once more alone with her father, her cheeks wet with the tears of others, her own eyes still hot and dry. They were to catch the four o'clock train; the afternoon was dark, and already the streets and shops were lighted; Paris, ever bright and gay, seemed to-night brighter and gayer than ever. She watched the placid-looking passengers, the idle loungers at the cafés;—did they know what pain was? Did they know that death was sure? Presently she found herself in a second-class carriage, wedged-in between her father and a heavy-featured priest, who diligently read a little dogs'-eared breviary. Opposite was a meek, weasel-faced *bourgeois*, with a managing wife, who ordered him about; then came a bushy-whiskered Englishman and a newly-married couple, while in the further corner, nearly hidden from view by the burly priest, lurked a gentle-looking Sister of Mercy, and a mischievous and fidgetty schoolboy. She watched them all as

in a dream of pain. Presently the priest left-off muttering and began to snore, and sleep fell, too, upon the occupants of the opposite seat. The little weasel-faced man looked most uncomfortable, for the Englishman used him as a prop on one side and the managing wife nearly overwhelmed him on the other; he slept fitfully, and always with the air of a martyr, waking up every few minutes and vainly trying to shake off his burdens, who invariably made stifled exclamations and sank back again.

'That would have been funny once,' thought Erica to herself. 'How I should have laughed. Shall I always be like this all the rest of my life, seeing what is ludicrous, yet with all the fun taken out of it?'

But her brain reeled at the thought of the 'rest of life.' The blank of bereavement, terrible to all, was absolute and eternal to her, and this was her first great sorrow. She had known pain, and privation, and trouble and anxiety, but actual anguish never. Now it had come to her, suddenly, irrevocably, never to be either more or less; perhaps to be fitted on as a gar-

ment as time wore on, and to become a natural part of her life; but always to be the same, a blank often felt, always present, till at length her end came and she too passed away into the great Silence.

Despair—the deprivation of all hope—is sometimes wild, but oftener calm with a deathly calmness. Erica was absolutely still,—she scarcely moved or spoke during the long weary journey to Calais. Twice only did she feel the slightest desire for any outward vent. At the Amiens station the school-boy in the corner, who had been growing more restless and excited every hour, sprang from the carriage to greet a small crowd of relations who were waiting to welcome him. She saw him rush to his mother, heard a confused, affectionate Babel of tongues, inquiries, congratulations, laughter. Oh! to think of that happy light-heartedness and the contrast between it and her grief. The laughter seemed positively to cut her; she could have screamed from sheer pain. And, as if cruel contrasts were fated to confront her, no sooner had her father established her in the

cabin on board the steamer, than two bright-looking English girls settled themselves close by, and began chatting merrily about the New Year and the novel beginning it would be on board a Channel steamer. Erica tried to stop her ears that she might not hear the discussion of all the forthcoming gaieties: 'Lady Reedham's dance on Thursday, our own, you know, next week,' &c., &c. But she could not shut out the sound of the merry voices, or that wounding laughter.

Presently an exclamation made her look and listen.

'Hark!' said one of her fellow-passengers. 'We shall start now; I heard the clock striking twelve. A happy New Year to you, Lily, and all possible good fortune.'

'Happy New Year!' echoed from different corners of the cabin; the little Sister of Mercy knelt down and told her beads, the rest of the passengers talked, congratulated, laughed. Erica would have given worlds to be able to cry, but she could not. The terrible mockery of her surroundings was too great, however,

to be borne; her heart seemed like ice, her head like fire, with a sort of feverish strength she rushed out of the cabin, stumbled up the winding staircase, and ran as if by instinct to that part of the deck where a tall, solitary figure stood up darkly in the dim light.

'It's too cold for you, my child,' said Raeburn, turning round at her approach.

'Oh, father, let me stay with you,' sobbed Erica, 'I can't bear it alone.'

Perhaps he was glad to have her near him for his own sake, perhaps he recognised the truth to which she unconsciously testified that human nature does at times cry out for something other than self, stronger and higher.

He raised no more objections, they listened in silence till the sound of the church bells died away in the distance, and then he found a more sheltered seat and wrapped her up closely in his own plaid, and together they began their new year. The first lull in Erica's pain came in that midnight crossing; the heaving of the boat, the angry dashing of the waves, the foam-laden

wind, all seemed to relieve her. Above all, there was comfort in the strong protecting arm round her. Yet she was too crushed and numb to be able to wish for anything but that the end might come for her there, that together they might sink down into the painless silence of death.

Raeburn only spoke once throughout the passage, instinctively he knew what was passing in Erica's mind. He spoke the only word of comfort which he had to speak: a noble one, though just then very insufficient:

'There is work to be done.'

Then came the dreary landing in the middle of the dark winter's night, and presently they were again in a railway carriage but this time alone. Raeburn made her lie down, and himself fell asleep in the opposite corner; he had been travelling uninterruptedly for twenty hours, had received a shock which had tried him very greatly, now from sheer exhaustion he slept. But Erica, to whom the grief was more new, could not sleep. Every minute the pain of realisation grew keener. Here she was in

England once more, this was the journey she had so often thought of and planned. This was going home! Oh, the dreariness of the reality when compared with those bright expectations! And yet it was neither this thought nor the actual fact of her mother's death which first brought the tears to her burning eyes.

Wearily shifting her position, she looked across to the other side of the carriage, and saw, as if in a picture, her father. Raeburn was a comparatively young man, very little over forty; but his anxieties and the almost incredible amount of hard work of the past two years had told upon him, and had turned his hair grey. There was something in his stern set face, in the strong man's reserved grief, in the pose of his grand-looking head, dignified even in exhaustion, that was strangely pathetic. Erica scarcely seemed to realise that he was her father. It was more as if she were gazing at some scene on the stage, or on a wonderfully graphic and heart-stirring picture. The pathos and sadness of it took hold of her;

she burst into a passion of tears, turned her face from the light, and cried as if no power on earth could ever stop her, her long-drawn sobs allowed to go unchecked since the noise of the train made them inaudible. She was so little given to tears, as a rule, that now they positively frightened her, nor could she understand how, with a real and terrible grief for which she could not weep, the mere pathetic sight should have brought down her tears like rain. But the outburst brought relief with it, for it left her so exhausted that for a brief half-hour she slept, and awoke just before they reached London, with such a frightful headache that the physical pain numbed the mental.

'How soon shall we be——' home she would have said, but the word choked her. 'How soon shall we get there?' she asked, faintly. She was so ill, so weary, that the mere thought of being still again—even in the death-visited home—was a relief, and she was really too much worn out to feel very acutely while they drove through the familiar streets.

At last, early in the cold, new year's morn-

ing, they were set down in Guilford Square, at the grim entrance to 'Persecution Alley.' She looked round at the grey old houses with a shudder; then her father drew her arm within his, and led her down the dreary little *cul de sac*. There was the house, looking the same as ever, and there was Aunt Jean coming forward to met them, with a strange new tenderness in her voice and look, and there was Tom in the background, seeming half shy and afraid to meet her in her grief, and there, above all, was the one great eternal void.

To watch beside the dying must be anguish, and yet surely not such keen anguish as to have missed the last moments, the last farewells, the last chance of serving. For those who have to come back to the empty house, the home which never can be home again, may God comfort them—no one else can.

Stillness, and food, and brief snatches of sleep somewhat restored Erica. Late in the afternoon she was strong enough to go into her mother's room, for that last look so inexpressibly

painful to all, so entirely void of hope or comfort to those who believe in no hereafter. Not even the peacefulness of death was there to give even a slight, a momentary relief to her pain; she scarcely even recognised her mother. Was that, indeed, all that was left? that pale, rigid, utterly changed face and form? Was that her mother? Could that once have been her mother? Very often had she heard this great change wrought by death referred to in discussions; she knew well the arguments which were brought forward by the believers in immortality, the counter arguments with which her father invariably met them, and which had always seemed to her conclusive. But somehow that which seemed satisfactory in the lecture-hall did not answer in the room of death. Her whole being seemed to flow out into one longing question. Might there not be a Beyond—an Unseen? Was this world indeed only

> 'A place to stand and love in for an hour,
> With darkness and the death-hour rounding it?'

She had slept in the afternoon, but at night,

when all was still, she could not sleep. The question still lurked in her mind; her sorrow and loneliness grew almost unbearable. She thought if she could only make herself cry again perhaps she might sleep, and she took down a book about Giordano Bruno, and read the account of his martyrdom, an account which always moved her very much. But to-night not even the description of the valiant unshrinking martyr of Freethought ascending the scaffold to meet his doom could in the slightest degree affect her. She tried another book, this time Dickens' 'Tale of Two Cities.' She had never read the last two chapters without feeling a great desire to cry; but to-night she read with perfect unconcern of Sidney Carton's wanderings through Paris on the night before he gave himself up,—read the last marvellously-written scene without the slightest emotion. It was evidently no use to try anything else; she shut the book, put out her candle, and once more lay down in the dark.

Then she began to think of the words which

had so persistently haunted Sidney Carton, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' She, too, seemed to be wandering about the Parisian streets, hearing these words over and over again. She knew that it was Jesus of Nazareth who had said this. What an assertion it was for a man to make! It was not even 'I *bring* the resurrection' or 'I *give* the resurrection,' but 'I *am* the Resurrection'! And yet, according to her father, his humility had been excessive, carried almost to a fault. Was he the most inconsistent man that ever lived, or what was he? At last she thought she would get up and see whether there was any qualifying context, and when and where he had uttered this tremendous saying.

Lighting her candle she crept, a little shivering, white-robed figure, round the book-lined room, scanning the titles on every shelf, but Bibles were too much in use in that house to be relegated to the attics, she found only the least interesting and least serviceable of her father's books. There was nothing for it but to go down to the study; so wrapping herself up, for

it was a freezing winter's night, she went noiselessly downstairs, and soon found every possible facility for biblical research.

A little baffled and even disappointed to find the words in that which she regarded as the least authentic of the gospels, she still resolved to read the account; she read it, indeed, in two or three translations, and compared each closely with the others, but in all the words stood out in uncompromising greatness of assertion. This man claimed to *be* the resurrection, or as Wyclif had it, the 'agen risyng and lyf.'

And then poor Erica read on to the end of the story and was quite thrown back upon herself by the account of the miracle which followed. It was a beautiful story, she said to herself, poetically written, graphically described, but as to believing it to be true, she could as soon have accepted the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' as having actually taken place.

Shivering with cold she put the books back on their shelf, and stole upstairs once more to bear her comfortless sorrow as best she could.

CHAPTER VIII.

'WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT?'

Then the round of weary duties, cold and formal, came to meet her,
With the life within departed that had given them each a soul;
And her sick heart even slighted gentle words that came to greet her,
For grief spread its shadowy pinions like a blight upon the whole.

A. A. Procter.

The winter sunshine which glanced in a side-long, half-and-half way into 'Persecution Alley,' and struggled in at the closed blinds of Erica's little attic, streamed unchecked into a far more cheerful room in Guilford Square, and illumined a breakfast-table, at which was seated one occupant only, apparently making a late

and rather hasty meal. He was a man of about eight and twenty, and though he was not absolutely good-looking, his face was one which people turned to look at again, not so much because it was in any way striking as far as features went, but because of an unusual luminousness which pervaded it. The eyes, which were dark grey, were peculiarly expressive, and their softness, which might to some have seemed a trifle unmasculine, was counterbalanced by the straight, dark, noticeable eyebrows, as well as by a thoroughly manly bearing and a general impression of unfailing energy which characterised the whole man. His hair, short beard and moustache were of a deep nut-brown. He was of medium height and very muscular-looking.

On the whole it was as pleasant a face as you would often meet with, and it was not to be wondered at that his old grandmother looked up pretty frequently from her arm-chair by the fire, and watched him with that beautiful loving pride which in the aged never seems exaggerated and very rarely misplaced.

'You were out very late, were you not,

Brian?' she observed, letting her knitting-needles rest for a minute, and scrutinising the rather weary-looking man.

'Till half-past five this morning,' he replied, in a somewhat preoccupied voice.

There was a sad look in his eyes, too, which his grandmother partly understood. She knitted another round of her sock and then said,

'Have you seen Tom Craigie yet?'

'Yes, last night I came across him,' replied Brian. 'He told me she had come home. They travelled by night and got in early yesterday morning.'

'Poor little thing!' sighed old Mrs. Osmond. 'What a home-coming it must have been!'

'Grannie,' said Brian, pushing back his chair and drawing nearer to the fire, 'I want you to tell me what I ought to do. I have a message to her from her mother, there was no one else to take it, you know, except the landlady, and I suppose she did not like that. I want to know when I might see her; one has no right to keep it back, and yet how am I to know whether she is fit to bear it? I can't write it

down, it won't somehow go on to paper, yet I can hardly ask to see her yet.'

'We cannot tell that the message might not comfort her,' said Mrs. Osmond. Then after a few minutes' thought she added, 'I think, Brian, if I were you, I would write her a little note, tell her why you want to see her, and let her fix her own time. You will leave it entirely in her own hands in that way.'

He mused for a minute, seemed satisfied with the suggestion, and, moving across to the writing-table, began his first letter to his love. Apparently it was hard to write, for he wasted several sheets, and much time that he could ill afford. When it was at length finished, it ran as follows :

'DEAR MISS RAEBURN,

'I hardly like to ask to see you yet for fear you should think me intrusive, but a message was intrusted to me on Tuesday night which I dare not of myself keep back from you. Will you see me?

If you are able to, and will name the time which will suit you best, I shall be very grateful. Forgive me for troubling you, and believe me,

'Yours faithfully,

'BRIAN OSMOND.'

He sent it off a little doubtfully, by no means satisfied that he had done a wise thing. But when he returned from his rounds later in the day the reply set his fears at rest.

It was written lengthways across a sheet of paper: the small delicate writing was full of character, but betrayed great physical exhaustion.

'It is good of you to think of us. Please come this afternoon if you are able.

'ERICA.'

That very afternoon! Now that his wish was granted, now that he was indeed to see her, Brian would have given worlds to have postponed the meeting. He was well accus-

tomed to visiting sorrow-stricken people, but from meeting such sorrow as that in the Raeburns' house he shrank back feeling his insufficiency. Besides, what words were delicate enough to convey all that had passed in that death-scene? How could he dare to attempt in speech all that the dying mother would fain have had conveyed to her child? And then his own love! Would not that be the greatest difficulty of all? Feeling her grief as he did, could he yet modify his manner to suit that of a mere outsider—almost a stranger? He was very diffident; though longing to see Erica, he would yet have given anything to be able to transfer his work to his father. This, however, was of course impossible.

Strange though it might seem, he—the most unsuitable of all men in his own eyes—was the man singled out to bear this message, to go to the death-visited household. He went about his afternoon work in a sort of steady, mechanical manner, the outward veil of his inward agitation. About four o'clock he was free to go to Guilford Terrace.

He was shown into the little sitting-room; it was the room in which Mrs. Raeburn had died, and the mere sight of the outer surroundings, the well-worn furniture, the book-lined walls, made the whole scene vividly present to him. The room was empty, there was a blazing fire but no other light, for the blinds were down, and even the winter twilight shut out. Brian sat down and waited. Presently the door opened, he looked up and saw Erica approaching him. She was taller than she had been when he last saw her, and now grief had given her a peculiar dignity which made her much more like her father. Every shade of colour had left her face, her golden-brown eyes were full of a limitless pain, the eyelids were slightly reddened, but apparently rather from sleeplessness than from tears, the whole face was so altered that a mere casual acquaintance would hardly have recognised it, except by the unchanged waves of short auburn hair which still formed the setting as it were to a picture, lovely even now. Only one other thing was unchanged, and that was the frank, unconvention-

al manner. Even in her grief she could not be quite like other people.

'It is very good of you to let me see you,' said Brian, 'you are sure you are doing right; it will not be too much for you to-day.'

'There is no great difference in days, I think,' said Erica, sitting down on a low chair beside the fire. 'I do not very much believe in degrees in this kind of grief, I do not see why it should be ever more or ever less. Perhaps I am wrong, it is all new to me.'

She spoke in a slow, steady, low-toned voice. There was an absolute hopelessness about her whole aspect which was terrible to see. A moment's pause followed, then, looking up at Brian, she fancied that she read in his face something of hesitation, of a consciousness that he could ill express what he wished to say, and her innate courtesy made her even now hasten to relieve him.

'Don't be afraid of speaking,' she said, a softer light coming into her eyes. 'I don't know why people shrink from meeting trouble. Even Tom is half afraid of me. I am not

changed, I am still Erica; can't you understand how much I want everyone now?'

'People differ so much?' said Brian, a little huskily, 'and then when one feels strongly words do not come easily.'

'Do you think I would not rather have your sympathy than an oration from anyone else! You who were here to the end! you who did everything for—for her. My father has told me very little, he was not able to, but he told me of you, how helpful you were, how good, not like an outsider at all!'

Evidently she clung to the comforting recollection that at least one trustable, sympathetic person had been with her mother at the last. Brian could only say how little he had done, how much more he would fain have done had it been possible.

'I think you do comfort me by talking,' said Erica. 'And now I want you, if you don't mind, to tell me all from the very first. I can't torture my father by asking him, and I couldn't bear it from the landlady. But you were here, you can tell me all. Don't be afraid of hurting

me; can't you understand, if the past were the only thing left to you, you would want to know every tiniest detail?'

He looked searchingly into her eyes, he thought she was right. There were no degrees to pain like hers! besides, it was quite possible that the lesser details of her mother's death might bring tears which would relieve her. Very quietly, very reverently, he told her all that had passed,—she already knew that her mother had died from aneurism of the heart,—he told her how in the evening he had been summoned to her, and from the first had known that it was hopeless, had been obliged to tell her that the time for speech even was but short. He had ordered a telegram to be sent to her father at Birmingham, but Mrs. Craigie and Tom were out for the evening, and no one knew where they were to be found. He and the landlady had been alone.

'She spoke constantly of you,' he continued. 'The very last words she said were these, "Tell Erica that only love can keep from bitterness, that love is stronger than the world's un-

kindness." Then after a minute's pause she added, "Be good to my little girl, promise to be good to her." After that, speech became impossible, but I do not think she suffered. Once she motioned to me to give her the frame off the mantelpiece with your photograph; she looked at it and kept it near her,—she died with it in her hand.'

Erica hid her face; that one trifling little incident was too much for her, the tears rained down between her fingers. That it should have come to that! no one whom she loved there at the last—but she had looked at the photograph, had held it to the very end, the voiceless, useless picture had been there, the real Erica had been laughing and talking at Paris! Brian talked on slowly, soothingly. Presently he paused; then Erica suddenly looked up, and dashing away her tears, said, in a voice which was terrible in its mingled pain and indignation,

'I might have been here! I might have been with her! It is the fault of that wretched man who went bankrupt; the fault of the bigots who will not treat us fairly—who ruin us!'

She sobbed with passionate pain, a vivid streak of crimson dyed her cheek, contrasting strangely with the deathly whiteness of her brow.

'Forgive me if I pain you,' said Brian; 'but have you forgotten the message I gave you? "It is only love that can keep from bitterness!"'

'Love!' cried Erica; she could have screamed it, if she had not been so physically exhausted. 'Do you mean I am to love our enemies!'

'It is only the love of all humanity that can keep from bitterness,' said Brian.

Erica began to think over his reply, and in thinking grew calm once more. By-and-by she lifted up her face; it was pale again now, and still, and perfectly hopeless.

'I suppose you think that only Christians can love all humanity,' she said, a little coldly.

'I should call all true lovers of humanity Christians,' replied Brian, 'whether they are consciously followers of Christ or not.'

She thought a little; then, with a curiously hard look in her face, she suddenly flashed round upon

him with a question, much as her father was in the habit of doing when an adversary had made some broad-hearted statement which had baffled him.

'Some of you give us a little more charity than others; but what do you mean by Christianity? You ask us to believe what is incredible. *Why* do you believe in the resurrection? What reason have you for thinking it true?'

She expected him to go into the evidence question, to quote the number of Christ's appearances, to speak of the five hundred witnesses of whom she was weary of hearing. Her mind was proof against all this; what could be more probable than that a number of devoted followers should be the victims of some optical delusion, especially when their minds were disturbed by grief. Here was a miracle supported on one side by the testimony of five hundred and odd spectators all longing to see their late Master, and contradicted on the other side by common-sense and the experience of the remainder of the human race during thousands of years! She looked full at Brian, a hard yet

almost exultant expression in her eyes, which spoke more plainly than words her perfect conviction :—

'You can't set your evidences against my counter-evidences! you can't logically maintain that a few uneducated men are to have more weight than all the united experience of mankind.'

Never would she so gladly have believed in the doctrine of immortality as now, yet with characteristic honesty and resoluteness she set herself into an attitude of rigid defence, lest through strong desire or mere bodily weariness she should drift into the acceptance of what might be, what indeed she considered to be error. But to her surprise, half to her disappointment, Brian did not even mention the evidences. She had braced herself up to withstand arguments drawn from the five hundred brethren, but the preparation was useless.

'I believe in the resurrection,' said Brian, 'because I cannot doubt Jesus Christ. He is the most perfectly loveable and trustable Being

I know, or can conceive of knowing. He said He should rise again, I believe that He did rise. He was perfectly truthful, therefore He could not mislead: He *knew*, therefore He could not be misled.'

'We do not consider Him to be all that you assert,' said Erica. 'Nor do His followers make one inclined to think that either He or His teaching were so perfect as you try to make out. You are not so hard-hearted as most of them——'

She broke off, seeing a look of pain on her companion's face.

'Oh, what am I saying!' she cried, in a very different tone, 'you who have done so much—you who were always good to us,—I did not indeed mean to hurt you, it is your creed that I can't help hating, not you. You are our friend, you said so long ago.'

'Always,' said Brian, 'never doubt that.'

'Then you must forgive me for having wounded you,' said Erica, her whole face softening. 'You must remember how hard it all is, and that I am so very, very miserable.'

He would have given his life to bring her comfort, but he was not a very great believer in words, and, besides, he thought she had talked quite as long as she ought.

'I think,' he said, 'that, honestly acted out, the message entrusted to me ought to c nfort your misery.'

'I can't act it out,' she said.

'You will begin to try,' was Brian's answer; and then, with a very full heart, he said good-bye and left his Undine sitting by the fire, with her head resting on her hands and the words of her mother's message echoing in her ears. 'It is only love that can keep from bitterness, love is stronger than the world's unkindness.'

Presently, not daring to dwell too much on that last scene which Brian had described, she turned to his strange, unexpected reason for his belief in the resurrection, and mused over the characteristics of his ideal. Then she thought she would like to see again what her ideal man had to say about his, and she got up and searched for a small book in a limp red cover,

labelled 'Life of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke Raeburn.' It was more than two years since she had seen it; she read it through once more. The style was vigorous, the veiled sarcasms were not unpleasant to her, she detected no unfairness in the mode of treatment, the book satisfied her, the conclusion arrived at seemed to her inevitable—Brian Osmond's ideal was not perfect.

With a sigh of utter weariness she shut the book and leant back in her chair with a still, white, hopeless face. Presently Friskarina sprang up on her knee with a little sympathetic mew; she had been too miserable as yet to notice even her favourite cat very much, now a scarcely perceptible shade of relief came to her sadness, she stroked the soft grey head. But scarcely had she spoken to her favourite, when the cat suddenly turned away, sprang from her knee and trotted out of the room. It seemed like actual desertion, and Erica could ill bear it just then.

'What, you too, Friskie,' she said to herself, 'are even you glad to keep away from me?'

She hid her face in her hands; desolate and miserable as she had been before, she now felt more completely alone.

In a few minutes something warm touching her foot made her look up, and with one bound Friskarina sprang into her lap, carrying in her mouth a young kitten. She purred contentedly, looking first at her child and then at her mistress, saying as plainly as if she had spoken,

'Will this comfort you?'

Erica stroked and kissed both cat and kitten, and for the first time since her trouble a feeling of warmth came to her frozen heart.

CHAPTER IX.

ROSE.

A life of unalloyed content,
A life like that of land-locked seas.
J. R. Lowell.

'Elspeth, you really must tell me, I'm dying of curiosity, and I can see by your face you know all about it! How is it that grandpapa's name is in the papers when he has been dead all these years? I tell you I saw it, a little paragraph in to-day's paper, headed, 'Mr. Luke Raeburn.' Is this another namesake who has something to do with him?'

The speaker was a tall, bright-looking girl of eighteen, a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired blonde, with a saucy little mouth, about which there now lurked an expression of undisguised

curiosity. Rose, for that was her name, was something of a coax, and all her life long she had managed to get her own way; she was an only child, and had been not a little spoilt; but in spite of many faults she was loveable, and beneath her outer shell of vanity and self-satisfaction there lay a sterling little heart.

Her companion, Elspeth, was a wrinkled old woman, whose smooth grey hair was almost hidden by a huge mob-cap, which, in defiance of modern custom, she wore tied under her chin. She had nursed Rose and her mother before her, and had now become more like a family friend than a servant.

'Miss Rose,' she replied, looking up from her work, 'if you go on chatter-magging away like this, there'll be no frock ready for you to-night,' and with a most uncommunicative air, the old woman turned away, and gave a little impressive shake to the billowy mass of white tarlatan to which she was putting the finishing touches.

'The white lilies just at the side,' said Rose, her attention diverted for a moment. 'Won't

it be lovely! the prettiest dress in the room, I'm sure.' Then, her curiosity returning, 'But, Elspeth, I shan't enjoy the dance a bit unless you tell me what Mr. Luke Raeburn has to do with us? Listen, and I'll tell you how I found out. Papa brought the paper up to mamma, and said, "Did you see this?" And then mamma read it, and the colour came all over her face, and she did not say a word, but went out of the room pretty soon. And then I took up the paper, and looked at the page she had been reading, and saw grandpapa's name.'

'What was it about?' asked old Elspeth.

'That's just what I couldn't understand; it was all about secularists. What are secularists? But it seems that this Luke Raeburn, whoever he is, has lost his wife. While he was lecturing at Birmingham on the soul, it said his wife died, and this paragraph said it seemed like a judgment, which was rather cool, I think.'

'Poor laddie!' sighed old Elspeth.

'Elspeth,' cried Rose, 'do you know who the man is?'

'Miss Rose,' said the old woman, severely,

'in my young days there was a saying that you'd do well to lay to heart, "Ask no questions, and you'll be told no stories."'

'It isn't your young days now, it's your old days, Elsie,' said the imperturbable Rose. 'I will ask you questions as much as I please, and you'll tell me what this mystery means, there's a dear old nursie! Have I not a right to know about my own relations?'

'Oh, bairn! bairn! if it were anything you'd like to hear; but why should you know what is all sad and gloomful? No, no, go to your balls, and think of your fine dresses and gran' partners, though, for the matter of that, it is but vanity of vanities——'

'Oh, if you're going to quote Ecclesiastes, I shall go!' said Rose, pouting. 'I wish that book wasn't in the Bible!' I'm sure such an old grumbler ought to have been in the Apocrypha.'

Elspeth shook her head, and muttered something about judgment and trouble. Rose began to be doubly curious.

Trouble, sadness, a mystery—perhaps a

tragedy! Rose had read of such things in books; were there such things actually in the family, and she had never known of them? A few hours ago and she had been unable to think of anything but her first ball, her new dress, her flowers; but she was seized now with the most intense desire to fathom this mystery. That it bid fair to be a sad mystery only made her more eager and curious. She was so young, so ignorant, there was still a halo of romance about those unknown things, trouble and sadness.

'Elspeth, you treat me like a child!' she exclaimed; 'it's really too bad of you.'

'Maybe you're right, bairn,' said the old nurse; 'but it's no doing of mine. But look here, Miss Rose, you be persuaded by me, go straight to your mamma and ask her yourself. Maybe there is a doubt whether you oughtn't to know, but there is no doubt that I mustn't tell you.'

Rose hesitated, but presently her curiosity overpowered her reluctance.

Mrs. Fane-Smith, or, as she had been called

in her maiden days, Isabel Raeburn, was remarkably like her daughter in so far as features and colouring were concerned, but she was exceedingly unlike her in character, for whereas Rose was vain and self-confident, and had a decided will of her own, her mother was diffident and exaggeratedly humble. She was a kind-hearted and a good woman, but she was in danger of losing almost all the real blessedness of life by perpetually harassing herself with the question, 'What will people say?'

She looked up apprehensively as her daughter came into the room. Rose felt sure she had been crying, her curiosity was still further stimulated, and with all the persuasiveness at her command, she urged her mother to tell her the meaning of the mysterious paragraph.

'I am sorry you have asked me,' said Mrs. Fane-Smith, 'but, perhaps, since you are no longer a child you had better know. It is a sad story, however, Rose, and I should not have chosen to tell it you to-day of all days.'

'But I want to hear, mamma,' said Rose, decidedly. 'Please begin. Who is this Mr. Raeburn?'

'He is my brother,' said Mrs. Fane-Smith, with a little quiver in her voice.

'Your brother! My uncle!' cried Rose, in amazement.

'Luke was the eldest of us,' said Mrs. Fane-Smith, 'then came Jean, and I was the youngest of all, at least of those who lived.'

'Then I have an aunt, too, an aunt Jean!' exclaimed Rose.

'You shall hear the whole story,' replied her mother. She thought for a minute, then in rather a low voice she began. 'Luke and Jean were always the clever ones, Luke especially; your grandfather had set his heart on his being a clergyman, and you can fancy the grief it was to us when he threw up the whole idea, and declared that he could never take orders. He was only nineteen when he renounced religion altogether; he and my father had a great dispute, and the end of it was that Luke was sent away from home, and I have never seen him since. He has become a very notorious infidel lecturer. Jean was very much unsettled by his change of views, and I believe her real

reason for marrying old Mr. Craigie was that she had made him promise to let her see Luke again. She married young and settled down in London, and when, in a few years, her husband died, she too renounced Christianity.'

To tell the truth, Rose was not deeply interested in the story, it fell a little flat after her expectations of a tragedy. It had, moreover, a sort of missionary flavour, and she had till the last few months lived in India, and had grown heartily tired of the details of mission-work, in which both her father and mother had been interested. Conversions, relapses, heathenism, belief and unbelief were words which had sounded so often in her ears that now they bored her; as they were the merest words to her it could hardly be otherwise. But Rose's best point was her loyalty to her own family, she had the 'clan' feeling very strongly, and she could not understand how her mother could have allowed such a complete estrangement to grow up between her and her nearest relations.

'Mamma,' she said, quickly, 'I should have gone to see Uncle Luke if I had been you.'

'It is impossible, dear,' replied Mrs. Fane-Smith. 'Your father would not allow it for one thing, and then only think what people would say! This is partly my reason for telling you, Rose; I want to put you upon your guard. We heard little or nothing of your uncle when we were in India, but you will find it very different here. He is one of the most notorious men in England; you must never mention his name, never allude to him, do you understand me?'

'Is he then so wicked?'

'My dear, consider what his teaching is, that is sufficient; I would not for the whole world allow our Greyshot friends to guess that we are connected with him in any way. It might ruin all your prospects in life.'

'Mamma,' said Rose, 'I don't think Mr. Raeburn will injure my prospects—of course you mean prospects of marrying. If a man didn't care enough for me to take me whether I am the niece of the worst man in England or not, do you think I would accept him?'

There was an angry ring in her voice as she

spoke, her little saucy mouth looked almost grand. After a moment's pause she added, more quietly, but with all the force of the true woman's heart which lay hidden beneath her silliness and frivolity, 'Besides, mamma, is it quite honest?'

'We are not bound to publish our family history to the world, Rose. If anyone asked me, of course I should tell the truth; if there was any way of helping my brother or his child, I would gladly serve them, even though the world would look coldly on me for doing so; but while they remain atheists how is it possible?'

'Then he has a child?'

'One only, I believe, a girl of about your own age.'

'Oh, mamma, how I should like to know her!'

'My dear Rose, how can you speak of such a thing! You don't realise that she is an atheist, has not even been baptised, poor little thing.'

'But she is my cousin, and she is a girl just like me,' said Rose. 'I should like to know her very much. I wonder whether she has come

out yet. I wonder how she enjoyed her first ball.'

'My dear! they are not in society.'

'How dull! what does she do all day, I wonder?'

'I cannot tell, and I wish you would not talk about her, Rose; I should not wish you even to think about her, except, indeed, to mention her in your prayers.'

'Oh, I'd much rather have her here to stay,' said Rose, with a little mischievous gleam in her eyes.

'Rose!'

'Why, mamma, if she were a black unbeliever you would be delighted to have her, it is only because she is white that you won't have anything to do with her. You would have been as pleased as possible if I had made friends with any of the ladies in the Zenanas.'

Mrs. Fane-Smith looked uncomfortable, and murmured that that was a very different question. Rose, seeing her advantage, made haste to follow it up.

'At any rate, mamma, you will write to Uncle Luke now that he is in trouble, and you'll let me send a note to his daughter? Only think, mamma, she has lost her mother so suddenly! just think how wretched she must be! Oh, mamma dear, I can't think how she can bear it!' and Rose threw her arms round her mother's neck. 'I should die too if you were to die! I'm sure I should!'

Rose was very persuasive, Mrs. Fane-Smith's motherly heart was touched; she sat down there and then, and for the first time since the summer day when Luke Raeburn had been turned out of his father's house, she wrote to her brother. Rose in the meantime had taken a piece of paper from her mother's writing-desk, and with a fat volume of sermons by way of a desk, was scribbling away as fast as she could. This was her letter:

'My dear Cousin,

'I don't know your name, and have only just heard anything about you, and the first thing I heard was that you were in dread-

ful trouble. I only write to send you my love and to say how very sorry I am for you. We only came to England in the autumn. I like it very much. I am going to my first ball to-night, and expect to enjoy it immensely. My dress is to be white tarla—— Oh, dear! how horrid of me to be writing like this to you. Please forgive me. I don't like to be so happy when you are unhappy; but, you see, I have only just heard of you, so it is a little difficult. With love,

'I remain,

'Your affectionate cousin,

'ROSE FANE-SMITH.'

That evening, while Erica, with eyes dim with grief and weariness, was poring over the books in her father's study, Rose was being initiated into all the delights of the ball-room. She was in her glory. Everything was new to her; she enjoyed dancing, she knew that she looked pretty, knew that her dress was charming, knew that she was much admired, and of course she liked it all. But the chaperons

shook their heads; it was whispered that Miss Fane-Smith was a terrible flirt, she had danced no less than seven dances with Captain Golightly. If her mother erred by thinking too much of what people said, perhaps Rose erred in exactly the opposite way; at any rate, she managed to call down upon her silly but innocent little head an immense amount of blame from the mothers and elderly ladies.

'A glorious moonlight night,' said Captain Golightly. 'What do you say, Miss Fane-Smith? Shall we take a turn in the garden? Or are you afraid of the cold?'

'Afraid! oh, dear, no,' said Rose, 'it is the very thing I should enjoy; I suppose I must get my shawl, though; it is upstairs.'

They were in the vestibule.

'Have my ulster,' said Captain Golightly. 'Here it is, just handy, and it will keep you much warmer.'

Rose laughed and blushed, and allowed herself to be put into her partner's coat, rather to the detriment of her billowy tarlatan. After a while they came back again from the dim gar-

den to the brightly-lighted vestibule, and as ill-luck would have it, chanced to encounter a stream of people going into the supper-room. Everyone stared at the apparition of Miss Fane-Smith in Captain Golightly's coat. With some difficulty she struggled out of it, and with very hot cheeks sought shelter in the ball-room.

'How dreadfully they looked! Do you think it was wrong of me?' she half-whispered to her partner.

'Oh, dear, no! sensible, and plucky, and everything delightful! You are much too charming to be bound down to silly conventionalities. Come, let us have this dance! I'm sure you are engaged to some one in the supper-room who can't deserve such a delightful partner. Let us have this *trois temps*, and hurl defiance at the Greyshot chaperons.'

Rose laughed, and allowed herself to be borne off. She had been excited before, now she was doubly excited, and Captain Golightly had the most delicious step imaginable.

CHAPTER X.

HARD AT WORK.

Longing is God's fresh heavenward will
With our poor earthward striving;
We quench it that we may be still
Content with merely living;
But, would we learn that heart's full scope
Which we are hourly wronging,
Our lives must climb from hope to hope
And realise our longing.

J. R. Lowell.

Perhaps it was only natural that there should be that winter a good deal of communication between the secularist's house in Guilford Terrace and the clergyman's house in Guilford Square. From the first Raeburn had taken a great fancy to Charles Osmond, and now that Brian had become so closely connected with

the memory of their sudden bereavement, and had made himself almost one of them by his silent, unobtrusive sympathy, and by his numberless acts of delicate considerateness, a tie was necessarily formed which promised to deepen into one of those close friendships that sometimes exist between two entire families.

It was a bleak, chilly afternoon in March, when Charles Osmond, returning from a long round of parish work, thought he would look in for a few minutes at the Raeburns'; he had a proposal to make to Erica, some fresh work which he thought might interest her. He rang the bell at the now familiar door and was admitted; it carried him back to the day when he had first called there and had been shown into the fire-lit room, with the book-lined walls, and the pretty little girl curled up on the rug, with her cat and her toasting-fork. Time had brought many changes since then. This evening he was again shown into the study, but this time the gas was lighted and there was no little girl upon the hearth-rug. Erica was

sitting at her desk hard at work. Her face lighted up at the sight of her visitor.

'Everyone is out except me,' she said, more brightly than he had heard her speak since her return. 'Did you really come to see me? How good of you.'

'But you are busy,' said Charles Osmond, glancing at the papers on her desk. 'Press-work?'

'Yes, my first article,' said Erica, 'it is just finished, but if you'll excuse me for one minute, I ought to correct it, the office boy will call for it directly.'

'Don't hurry; I will wait and get warm in the meantime,' said Charles Osmond, establishing himself by the fire.

There was a silence broken only by the sound of Erica's pen as she crossed out a word or a line. Charles Osmond watched her and mused. This beautiful girl, whose development he could trace now for more than two years back, what would she grow into? Already she was writing in the *Idol-Breaker*.

He regretted it. Yet it was obviously the

most natural employment for her. He looked at her ever-changing face, she was absorbed in her work, her expression varying with the sentences she read; now there was a look of triumphant happiness as she came to something which made her heart beat quickly, again a shade of dissatisfaction at the consciousness of her inability to express what was in her mind. He could not help thinking that it was one of the noblest faces he had ever seen, and now that the eyes were downcast it was not so terribly sad; there was moreover for the first time since her mother's death a faint tinge of colour in her cheeks. Before five minutes could have passed, the bell rang again.

'That is my boy,' she exclaimed, and, hastily blotting her sheets, she rolled them up, gave them to the servant, closed her desk, and, crossing the room, knelt down in front of the fire to warm her hands, which were stiff and chilly.

'How rude I have been to you,' she said, smiling a little, 'I always have been rude to you, since the very first time we met.'

'We were always frank with each other,' said Charles Osmond; 'I remember you gave me your opinion as to bigots and Christians in the most delightfully open way. So you have been writing your first article?'

'Yes,' and she stretched herself as though she were rather tired and cramped. 'I have had a delicious afternoon. Yesterday I was in despair about it, but to-day it just came—I wrote it straight off.'

'And you are satisfied with it?'

'Satisfied? oh, no! Is anybody ever satisfied? By the time it is in print I shall want to alter every sixth line. Still, I daresay it will say a little of what I want said.'

'Oh, you do want something said?'

'Of course!' she replied, a little indignantly. 'If not, how could I write.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Charles Osmond, 'and you mean to take this up as your vocation?'

'If I am thought worthy,' said Erica, colouring a little.

'I see you have high ideas of the art,' said

Charles Osmond; 'and what is your reason for taking it up?'

'First of all, though it sounds rather illogical,' said Erica, 'I write because I *must*, there is something in me which will have its say. Then, too, it is part of our creed that everyone should do all in his power to help on the cause, and of course, if only for my father's sake, it would be my greatest pleasure. Then, last of all, I write because I must earn my living.'

'Good reasons all,' said Charles Osmond. 'But I don't feel sure that you won't regret having written when you look back several years hence.'

'Oh! I daresay it will all seem crude and ridiculous then, but one must make a beginning,' said Erica.

'And are you sure you have thought out these great questions so thoroughly and fairly that you are capable of teaching others about them?'

'Ah! now I see what you mean!' exclaimed Erica, 'you think I write in defence of atheism, or as an attacker of Christianity. I do nothing

of the kind, father would not allow me to, he would not think me old enough. Oh! no, I am only to write the lighter articles which are needed every now and then. To-day I had a delightful subject—"Heroes—what are they?"'

'Well, and what is your definition of a hero, I wonder, what are the qualities you think absolutely necessary to make one?'

'I think I have only two absolutely necessary ones,' said Erica, 'but my heroes must have these two, they must have brains and goodness.'

'A tolerably sweeping definition,' said Charles Osmond, laughing, 'almost equal to a friend of mine who wanted a wife, and said there were only two things he would stipulate for—£1500 a year, and an angel! But it brings us to another definition, you see. We shall agree as to the brains, but how about goodness? What is your definition of that very wide, not to say vague, term?'

Erica looked puzzled.

'I don't think I can define it,' she said, 'but one knows it when one sees it.'

'Do you mean by it, unselfishness, courage, truthfulness or any other virtue?'

'Oh! it isn't any one virtue, or even a parcel of virtues, it will not go into words.'

'It is then the nearest approach to some perfect ideal which is in your mind?'

'I suppose it is,' she said, slowly.

'How did that ideal come into your mind?'

'I don't know, I suppose I got it by inheritance.'

'From the original moneron?'

'You are laughing at me. I don't know how of course, but I have it, which, as far as I can see, is all that matters.'

'I am not sure of that,' said Charles Osmond. 'The explanation of that ideal of goodness which more or less clearly exists in all our minds, seems to me to rest only in the conviction that all are children of one perfect Father. And I can give you our definition of goodness without hesitation, it is summed up for us in one word—"Christlikeness.'

'I cannot see it, it seems to me all exaggerated,' said Erica, 'I believe it is only because

people are educated to believe and predisposed to think it all good and perfect that there are so many Christians. You may say it is we who are prejudiced. If we are, I'm sure you Christians have done enough to make us so! How could I, for instance, be anything but an atheist? Shall I tell you the very first thing I can remember.'

Her eyes were flashing with indignant light.

'I was a little tiny child—only four years old—but there are some scenes one never forgets. I can see it all as plainly as possible, the room in a hotel, the very doll I was playing with. There was a great noise in the street, trampling, hissing, hooting. I ran to the window, an immense crowd was coming nearer and nearer, the street was black with the throng, they were all shouting and yelling —"Down with the infidel!" "Kill the atheist!" Then I saw my father, he was there strong and fearless, one man against a thousand! I tell you I saw him, I can see him now, fighting his way on single-handed, not one creature brave

enough to stand up for him! I saw him pushed, struck, spit upon, stoned. At last a great brick struck him on the head. I think I must have been too sick or too angry to see any more after that. The next thing I remember is lying on the floor sobbing, and hearing father come into the room and say, "Why little son Eric, did you think they'd killed me?" And he picked me up and let me sit on his knee, but there was blood on his face, and as he kissed me it dropped upon my forehead. I tell you, you Christians baptized me into atheism in my own father's blood! They were Christians who stoned him, champions of religion, and they were egged on by the clergy! Did I not hear it all then in my babyhood? And it is true! it is all fact! ask anybody you like! I have not exaggerated!'

'My dear child, I know you have not,' said Charles Osmond, putting his strong hand upon hers. He could feel that she was all trembling with indignation. Was it to be wondered at? 'I remember those riots perfectly well,' he continued. 'I think I felt and feel as indignant

about them as yourself. A fearful mistake was made—Mr. Raeburn was shamefully treated. But Erica,'—it was the first time he had called her by her name,—'you who pride yourself upon fairness, you who make justice your watchword, must be careful not to let the wrong-doing of a few Christians prejudice you against Christianity. You say that we are all predisposed to accept Christ, but candidly you must allow I think that you are trebly prejudiced against the very name of Christian. A Christian almost inevitably means to you only one of your father's mistaken persecutors.'

'Yes, you are so much of an exception that I always forget you are one,' said Erica, smiling a little. 'Yet you are not like one of us quite —you somehow stand alone, you are unlike anyone I ever met; you and Thekla Sonnenthal and your son make to me a sort of new variety.'

Charles Osmond laughed, and changed the subject.

'You are busy with your examination work,

I suppose?' And the question led to a long talk about books and lectures.

In truth, Erica had plunged into work of all kinds, not merely from love of it, but because she felt the absolute need of fresh interests, the great danger of dwelling unduly on her sorrow. Then, too, she had just grasped a new idea, an idea at once noble and inspiriting. Hitherto she had thought of a happy future for herself, of a home free from troubles and harassing cares. That was all over now, her golden dream had come to an end, and 'Hope dead lives nevermore.' The life she had pictured to herself could never be, but her nature was too strong to be crushed by the sorrow; physically the shock had weakened her far more than anyone knew, but, mentally, it had been a wonderful stimulant. She rose above herself, above her trouble, and life began to mean something broader and deeper than before.

Hitherto her great desire had been to be free from care, and to be happy; now the one important thing seemed not so much to be happy, as to know. To learn herself, and to help

others to learn, became her chief object, and, with all the devotion of an earnest, high-souled nature, she set herself to act out these convictions. She read hard, attended lectures, and twice a week taught in the night school attached to the Institute.

Charles Osmond could not help smiling as she described her days to him. She still retained something of the childishness of an Undine, and as they talked she had taken up her old position on the hearthrug, and Friskarina had crept on to her knee. Here, undoubtedly, was one whom ignorant people would stigmatise as 'blue' or as a '*femme savante*;' they would of course be quite wrong and inexpressibly foolish to use such terms, and yet there was, perhaps, something a little incongruous in the two sides, as it were, of Erica's nature, the keen intellect and the child-like devotion, the great love of learning and the intense love of fun and humour. Charles Osmond had only once in all his long years of experience met with a character which interested him so much.

'After all,' he said, when they had talked for

some time, 'I have never told you that I came on a begging errand, and I half fear that you will be too busy to undertake any more work.'

Erica's face brightened at the word; was not work what she lived for?

'Oh! I am not too busy for anything!' she exclaimed. 'I shall quote Marcus Aurelius to you if you say I haven't time! What sort of work?'

'Only, when you can, to come in to us in the afternoon and read a little to my mother. Do you think you could? Her eyes are failing, and Brian and I are hard at work all day; I am afraid she is very dull.'

'I should like to come very much,' said Erica, really pleased at the suggestion. 'What sort of books would Mrs. Osmond like?'

'Oh, anything! history, travels, science, or even novels, if you are not above reading them!'

'I? of course not,' said Erica, laughing. 'Don't you think we enjoy them as much as other people? when there is time to read them, at least, which isn't often.'

Charles Osmond laughed.

'Very well, then, you have a wide field. From Carlyle to Miss Bird, and from Ernst Haeckel to Charles Reade. I should make them into a big sandwich if I were you.'

He said good-bye, and left Erica still on the hearth-rug, her face brighter than it had been for months.

'I like that man,' she said to herself. 'He's honest and thorough, and good all through. Yet how in the world does he make himself believe in his creed! Goodness, Christlikeness. He looked so grand, too, as he said that. It is wonderful what a personal sort of devotion those three have for their ideal.'

She wandered away to recollections of Thekla Sonnenthal, and that carried her back to the time of their last parting, and the recollection of her sorrow. All at once the loneliness of the present was borne in upon her overwhelmingly; she looked round the little room, the Ilkley couch was pushed away into a corner, there was a pile of newspapers upon it. A great sob escaped her. For a minute she pressed her hands tightly together over her eyes, then she

hurriedly opened a book on 'Electricity,' and began to read as if for her life.

She was roused in about an hour's time by a laughing exclamation. She started, and, looking up, saw her cousin Tom.

'Talk about absorption, and brown studies!' he cried, 'why, you beat everything I ever saw. I've been looking at you for at least three minutes.'

Tom was now about nineteen; he had inherited the auburn colouring of the Raeburns, but otherwise he was said to be much more like the Craigies. He was nice-looking, but somewhat freckled, and though he was tall and strongly built, he somehow betrayed that he had led a sedentary life and looked, in fact, as if he wanted a training in gymnastics. For the rest he was shrewd, business-like, good-natured, and at present very conceited. He had been Erica's friend and playfellow as long as she could remember, they were brother and sister in all but the name, for they had lived within a stone's throw of each other all their lives, and now shared the same house.

'I never heard you come in,' she said, smiling a little. 'You must have been very quiet.'

'I don't believe you'd hear a salute fired in the next room if you were reading, you little bookworm! But look here! I've got a parody on the chieftain that'll make you cry with laughing. You remember the smashed windows at the meeting at Rilchester last week?'

Erica remembered well enough, she had felt sore and angry about it, and the comments in the newspapers had not been consolatory. She had learnt to dread even the comic papers, but there was nothing spiteful in the one which Tom produced that evening. It was headed:

SCOTCH SONG.

Tune—'*'Twas within a mile of Edinboro' town.*'

'Twas within a hall of Rilchester town,
In the bleak spring time of the year,
Luke Raeburn gave a lecture on the soul of man,
And found that it cost him dear.
Windows all were smashed that day,
They said, "The atheist can pay,"
But Scottish Raeburn frowning cried,
"Na, na, it winna do,
I canna, canna, winna, winna, munna pay for you."

The parody ran on through the three verses of the song, the conclusion was really witty, and there was no sting in it. Erica laughed over it as she had not laughed for weeks. Tom, who had been trying unsuccessfully to cheer her ever since her return, was quite relieved.

'I believe the sixpence a day style suits you,' he said, 'but, I say, isn't anything coming up? I'm as hungry as a hunter.'

Their elders being away for a few days, Tom and Erica were amusing themselves by trying to live on the rather strange diet of the man who published his plan for living at the smallest possible cost. They were already beginning to be rather weary of porridge, pea-soup, and lentils. This evening pea-soup was in the ascendant, and Erica, tired with a long afternoon's work, felt as if she could almost as soon have eaten Thames mud.'

'Dear me,' she said, 'it never struck me, this is our Lenten penance! Now, wouldn't anyone looking-in fancy we were poor Romanists without an indulgence?'

'Certainly without any self-indulgence,' said Tom, who never lost an opportunity of making a bad pun.

'It would be a great indulgence to stop eating,' said Erica, sighing over the soup yet to be swallowed.

'Do you think it is more inspiriting to fast in order to save one's soul, than it is to pay the chieftain's debts? I wish I could honestly say, like the little French girl in her confession, "J'ai trop mangé."'

Tom dearly loved that story, he was exceedingly fond of getting choice little anecdotes from various religious newspapers, especially those which dealt in much abuse of the Church of Rome, and ` etailed them *con amore*. Erica listened to veral to-night and laughed a good deal over them.

'I wonder, though, they don't see how they play into our hands by putting in these things,' she said, after Tom had given her a description of some ludicrous attack made by a ritualist on an evangelical. I should have thought they would have tried to agree whenever they could,

instead of which they seem almost as spiteful to each other as they are to us.'

'They'd know better if they'd more than a grain of sense between them,' said Tom, sweepingly, 'but they haven't; and as they're always playing battledore and shuttlecock with that, it isn't much good to either. Of course they play into our hands! I believe the spiteful ultra-high paper, and the spiteful ultra-low paper do more to promote atheism than the *Idol-Breaker* itself.'

'How dreadful it must be for men like Mr. Osmond, who see all round, and yet can't stop what they must think the mischief. Mr. Osmond has been here this afternoon.'

'Ah, now, he's a stunning fellow, if you like,' said Tom. 'He's not one of the pig-headed narrow-minded set. How he comes to be a parson I can't make out.'

'Well, you see, from their point of view it is the best thing to be, I mean he gets plenty of scope for work. I expect he feels as much obliged to speak and teach as father does.'

'Pity he's not on our side,' said Tom, 'they

say he's a first-rate speaker. But I'm afraid he is perfectly crazy on that point, he'll never come over.'

'I don't think we've a right to put the whole of his religiousness down to a mania,' said Erica. 'Besides, he is not the sort of man to be even a little mad, there's nothing the least fanatical about him.'

'Call it delusion, if you like it better. What's in a name? The thing remains the same! A man can't believe what is utterly against reason without becoming, as far as that particular belief is concerned, unreasonable, beyond the pale of reason, therefore deluded, therefore mad.'

Erica looked perplexed; she did not think Tom's logic altogether good, but she could not correct it. There was, however, a want of generosity about the assertion which instantly appealed to her fine sense of honour.

'I can't argue it out,' she said at last, 'but it doesn't seem to me fair to put down what we can't understand in other people to madness; it never seemed to me quite fair for Festus to accuse Paul of madness when he really had

made a splendid defence, and it doesn't seem fair that you should accuse Mr. Osmond of being mad.'

'Only on that one point,' said Tom. 'Just a little touched, you know. How else can you account for a man like that believing what he professes to believe.'

'I don't know,' said Erica, relapsing into perplexed silence.

'Besides,' continued Tom, 'you cry out because I say they must be just a little touched, but they accuse us of something far worse than madness, they accuse us of absolute wickedness.'

'Not all of them,' said Erica.

'The greater part,' said Tom. 'How often do you think the chieftain meets with really fair treatment from his antagonists?'

Erica had nothing to say to this. The harshness and intolerance which her father had constantly to encounter was the great grief of her life, the perpetual source of indignation, her strongest argument against Christianity.

'Have you much to do to-night?' she asked,

not anxious to stir up afresh the revolt against the world's injustice which the merest touch would set working within her. 'I was thinking that, if there was time to spare, we might go to see the Professor; he has promised to show me some experiments.'

'Electricity?' Tom pricked up his ears. 'Not half a bad idea. If you'll help me, we can polish off the letters in an hour or so, and be free by eight o'clock.'

They set to work, and between them disposed of the correspondence.

It was a great relief to Erica after her long day's work to be out in the cool evening air. The night was fine but very windy, indeed the sudden gusts at the street corners made her glad to take Tom's arm. Once, as they rather slackened their speed, half-baffled by the storm, a sentence from a passer-by fell on their ears. The speaker looked like a countryman.

'Give me a good gas-burner with pipes and a meter that a honest man can understand! Now this 'ere elective light I say it's not canny;

I've no belief in things o' that kind, it won't never——'

The rest of the speech died away in the distance. Tom and Erica laughed, but the incident set Erica thinking. Here was a man who would not believe what he could not understand, who wanted 'pipes and a meter,' and for want of comprehensible outward signs pooh-poohed the great new discovery.

'Tom,' she said, slowly, and with the manner of one who makes a very unpleasant suggestion, reluctantly putting forward an unwelcome thought, 'suppose if, after all, we are like that man, and reject a grand discovery because we don't know and are too ignorant to understand! Tom, just suppose if, after all, Christianity should be true and we in the wrong!'

'Just suppose if, after all, the earth should be a flat plain with the sun moving round it!' replied Tom, scornfully.

They were walking down the Strand; he did not speak for some minutes, in fact he was looking at the people who passed by them. For the first time in his life a great contrast

struck him. Disreputable vulgarity, wickedness, and vice stared him in the face, then involuntarily he turned to Erica and looked down at her scrutinizingly as he had never looked before. She was evidently rapt in thought, but it was not the intellect in her face which he thought of just then, though it was ever noticeable, nor was it the actual beauty of feature which struck him, it was rather an undefined consciousness that here was a purity which was adorable. From that moment he became no longer a boy, but a man with a high standard of womanhood. Instantly he thought with regret of his scornful little speech,—it was contemptible!

'I beg your pardon,' he said, abruptly, as if she had been following his whole train of thought. 'Of course one is bound to study the question fairly; but we have done that, and all that remains for us is to live as usefully as we can and as creditably to the cause as may be.'

They had turned down one of the dingy little streets leading to the river, and now stood outside Professor Gosse's door. Erica

did not reply. It was true she had heard arguments for and against Christianity all her life, but had she ever studied it with strict impartiality? Had she not always been strongly biassed in favour of Secularism? Had not Mr. Osmond gone unpleasantly near the mark when he warned her against being prejudiced by the wrong doing of a few modern Christians against Christianity itself! She was coming now for special instruction in science from one who was best calculated to teach; she would not have dreamt of asking instruction from one who was a disbeliever in science. Would the same apply in matters of religious belief? Was she bound actually to ask instruction from Charles Osmond, for instance, even though she believed that he taught error,—harmful error? Yet who was to be the judge of what was error, except by perfectly fair consideration of both sides of the case. Had she been fair? What was perfect fairness?

But people must go on living, and must speak and act even though their minds are in a chaos of doubts and questionings. They had

reached Professor Gosse's study, or as he himself called it, his workshop, and Erica turned with relief to the verifiable results of scientific inquiry.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHEELS RUN DOWN.

Great grace, as saith Sir Thomas More,
To him must needs be given,
Who heareth heresy, and leaves
The heretic to Heaven.

WHITTIER.

THE clock in a neighbouring church tower was just striking five on a warm afternoon in June. The pillar-box stood at the corner of Guilford Square nearest the church, and on this particular afternoon there chanced to be several people running at the last moment to post their letters. Among others were Brian and Erica. Brian, with a great bundle of parish notices, had just reached the box when running down the other side of the square at full speed he

saw his Undine carrying a bag full of letters. He had not met her for some weeks, for it happened to have been a busy time with him, and, though she had been very good in coming to read to old Mrs. Osmond, he had always just missed her.

'This is a funny meeting-place,' she exclaimed, rather breathlessly. 'It never struck me before what a truly national institution the Post Office is,—a place where people of all creeds and opinions can meet together, and are actually treated alike!'

Brian smiled.

'You have been very busy,' he said, glancing at the innumerable envelopes, which she was dropping as fast as might be into the narrow receptacle. He could see that they were directed in her small, clear, delicate hand-writing.

'And you, too,' she said, looking at his diminished bundle. 'Mine are Secularist circulars, and yours, I suppose, are the other kind of thing, but you see the same pillar eats them up quite contentedly. The Post Office is beautifully national, it sets a good example.'

She spoke lightly, but there was a peculiar tone in her voice which betrayed great weariness. It made Brian look at her more attentively than he had yet done—less from a lover's point of view, more from a doctor's. She was very pale. Though the running had brought a faint colour to her cheeks, her lips were white, her forehead almost deathly. He knew that she had never really been well since her mother's death, but the change wrought within the last three weeks dismayed him; she was the mere shadow of her former self.

'This hot weather is trying you,' he said.

'Something is,' she replied. 'Work, or weather, or worry, or the three combined.'

'Come in and see my father,' said Brian, 'and be idle for a little time; you will be writing more circulars if you go home.'

'No, they are all done, and my examination is over, and there is nothing special going on just now; I think that is why I feel so like breaking down.'

After a little more persuasion, she consented

to go in and see Mr. Osmond. The house always had a peculiarly restful feeling, and the mere thought of rest was a relief to her; she would have liked the wheels of life to stop for a little while, and there was rest in the mere change of atmosphere. On the doorstep Brian encountered a patient, much to his vexation; so he could only take Erica into the study, and go in search of his father. He lingered, however, just to tell him of his fears.

'She looks perfectly worn out; you must find out what is wrong, father, and make her promise to see some one.'

His tone betrayed such anxiety that his father would not smile, although he was secretly amused at the task deputed to him. However, clergyman as he was, he had a good deal of the doctor about him, and he had seen so much of sickness and disease, during his long years of hard work among the poor, that he was after all about as ready an observer and as good a judge as Brian could have selected.

Erica leaning back in the great easy-chair, which had been moved into summer quarters

beside the window, heard the slow soft step she had learned to know so well, and before she had time to get up, found her hand in Charles Osmond's strong clasp.

'How comfortable your chair is,' she said, smiling; 'I believe I was nearly asleep.'

He looked at her attentively, but without appearing to study her face in any way. She was very pale, and there was an indefinable look of pain in her eyes.

'Any news of the examination?' he asked, sitting down opposite her.

'No, it is too soon yet,' she replied. 'I thought I should have felt so anxious about it; but do you know, now that it is over, I can't make myself care a bit. If I have failed altogether, I don't believe I shall mind very much.'

'Too tired to care for anything?'

'Yes, I seem to have come to the end. I wish I were a watch, and could run down and rest for a few days and be wound up again.'

He smiled. 'What have you been doing with yourself to get so tired?'

'Oh, nothing particular; it has been rather a

long day. Let me see! In the morning there were two delegates from Rilchester who had to be kept in a good temper till my father was ready for them; then there was father's bag to be packed, and a rush to get him off in time for the morning express to Longstaff. Then I went to a lecture at South Kensington, and then by train to Aldersgate Street to see Hazeldine's wife, who is unconscionable enough to live at the top of one of the model lodging-houses. Then she told me of another of our people whose child is ill, and they lived in another row of Compton Buildings up a hundred more steps, which left my back nearly broken. And the poor little child was fearfully ill, and it is so dreadful to see pain you can do nothing for; it has made me feel wretched ever since. Then,—let me think —oh, I got home and found Aunt Jean with a heap of circulars to get off, and there was a great rush to get them ready by post time.'

She paused, Charles Osmond withdrew his eyes from the careful scrutiny of her face and noticed the position she had taken up in his chair. She was leaning back, but with her arms rest-

ing on the arms of the chair; not merely stretched out upon them, but rather as if she used them for support. His eyes wandered back again to her face. After a short silence, he spoke.

'You have been feeling very tired lately, you have had unaccountable pains flying about all over you, but specially your back has felt, as you just said, somewhat "broken." You have generally noticed this when you have been walking or bending over your desk writing for the *Idol-Breaker*.'

She laughed.

'Now, please don't turn into a clairvoyant; I shall begin to think you uncanny; and, besides, it would be an argument for Tom when we quarrel about you.'

'Then my surmises are true?'

'Substitute first person singular for second plural, and it might have come from my own lips,' said Erica, smiling. 'But please stop; I'm afraid you will try to turn prophet next, and I'm sure you will prophesy something horrid.'

'It would need no very clear-sighted prophet

to prophesy that you will have to let your wheels run down for a little while.'

'Do you mean that you think I shall die?' asked Erica, languidly. 'It wouldn't be at all convenient just now; father couldn't spare me. Do you know,' and her face brightened, 'he is really beginning to use me a good deal!'

'I didn't mean that I thought your wheels would run down in that way,' said Charles Osmond, touched by the pathos of her words. 'I may even be wrong, but I think you will want a long rest, and I am quite sure you mustn't lose a day before seeing a doctor. I should like my brother to see you; Brian is only junior partner, you know.'

'What, another Mr Osmond! How muddled we shall get between you all!' said Erica, laughing.

'I should think that Brian might be Brian by this time,' said Charles Osmond, 'that will dispose of one; and perhaps you would like to follow the example of one of my servants, who I hear invariably speaks of me as "the dear rev."'

Erica laughed.

'No, I shall call you my "prophet," though it is true you have begun by being a prophet of evil! By-the-by, you cannot say again that I am not impartial. What do you think Tom and I did last week?'

'Read the New Testament backwards?'

'No, we went to a Holy Scripture Society meeting at Exeter Hall.'

'Hope you were edified,' said Charles Osmond, with a little twinkle in his eye; but he sighed, nevertheless.

'Well,' said Erica, 'it was rather curious to hear everything reversed, and there was a good deal of fun altogether. They talked a great deal about the numbers of bibles, testaments, and portions which had been sent out; there was one man who spoke very broadly, and kept on speaking of the "*portions*," and there was another whom we called the "Great Door," because eight times in his speech he said that a great door had been opened for them in Italy and other places. Altogether, I thought them rather smug and self-satisfied, especially one man whose face

shone on the slightest provocation, and who remarked, in broad Lincolnshire, that they had been "Aboondantly blessed." After his speech a little short, sleek, oily man got up, and talked about Providence. Apparently it had been very kind to him, and he thought the other sort of thing did best for those who got it. But there were one or two really good speakers, and I daresay they were all in earnest. Still, you know, Tom and I felt rather like fish out of water, and especially when they began to sing, "Oh, Bible, blessed Bible!" and a lady would make me share her hymn-book. Then, too, there was a collection, and the man made quite a pause in front of us, and of course we couldn't give anything. Altogether, I felt rather horrid and hypocritical for being there at all.'

'Is that your only experience of one of our meetings?'

'Oh, no, father took me with him two or three times to Westminster Abbey a good many years ago; we heard the dean, father admired him very much. I like Westminster Abbey! It

seems to belong a little to us, too, because it is so national. And then it so beautiful, and I liked hearing the music. I wonder though that you are not a little afraid of having it so much in your worship; I remember hearing a beautiful anthem there once, which just thrilled one all through. I wonder that you don't fear that people should mistake that for what you call spiritual fervour.'

'I think perhaps there is a danger in any undue introduction of externals, but anyone whose spirit has ever been awakened will never mistake the mere thrill of sensuous rapture for the quickening of his spirit by the Unseen.'

'You are talking riddles to me now!' said Erica, 'but I feel sure that some of the people who go to church regularly only like it because of that appeal to the senses. I shall never forget going one afternoon into Notre Dame with Madame Lemercier. A flood of crimson and purple light was shining in through the south transept windows. You could see the white-robed priests and choristers—there was one boy with the most perfect voice

you can conceive. I don't know what they were singing, something very sweet and mournful, and, as that one voice rang up into the vaulted roof, I saw Madame Lemercier fall down on her knees and pray in a sort of rapture. Even I myself felt the tears come to my eyes, just because of the loveliness, and because the blood in one's veins seemed to bound. And then, still singing, the procession passed into the nave, and the lovely voice grew more and more distant. It was a wonderful effect; no doubt the congregation thought they felt devout, but, if so, then I too felt devout,—quite as religious as they. Your spiritual fervour seems to me to resolve itself into artistic effect produced by an appeal to the senses and emotions.'

'And I must repeat my riddle,' said Charles Osmond, quietly. 'No awakened spirit could ever mistake the one for the other. It is impossible! how impossible you will one day realise.'

'One evil prophecy is enough for to-day!' said Erica, laughing. 'If I stay any longer, you will be prophesying my acceptance of Christi-

anity? No, no, my father will be grieved enough if your first prediction comes true, but, if I were to turn Christian, I think it would break his heart!'

She rose to go, and Charles Osmond went with her to the door, extracting a promise that she would discuss things with her aunt, and if she approved send for Mr. Osmond at once. He watched her across the square, then turning back into his study paced to and fro in deep thought. Erica's words rang in his ears. 'If I were to turn Christian, I think it would break his heart!' How strangely this child was situated! How almost impossible it seemed that she could ever in this world come to the light. And yet the difficulty might perhaps be no hindrance to one so beautifully sincere, so ready to endure anything and everything for the sake of what she now considered truth. She had all her father's zeal and self-devotion; surely the offering up of self, even in a mistaken cause, must sooner or later lead to the Originator of all self-sacrifice. Surely some of those who seem only to thwart God, honestly

deeming Christianity a mischievous delusion, are really acting more in His spirit, unconsciously better doing His will than many who openly declare themselves on His side! Yet, as Charles Osmond mused over the past lives of Luke Raeburn and his daughter, and pictured their probable future, a great grief filled his heart. They were both so loveable, so noble! that they should miss in a great measure the best of life seemed such a grievous pity! The chances that either of them would renounce atheism were, he could not but feel, infinitesimally small. Much smaller for the father than for the child.

It was true, indeed, that she had never fairly grasped any real idea of the character of Christ. He had once grasped it to a certain extent, and had lost the preception of its beauty and truth. It was true also that Erica's transparent sincerity, her quick perception of the beautiful, might help very greatly to overcome her deeply-ingrained prejudices. But even then what an agony —what a fearful struggle would lie before her. 'I think it would break his heart!' Charles

Osmond felt his breath come fast and hard at the mere thought of such a difference between the father and daughter. Could human strength possibly be equal to such a terrible trial? For these two were everything to each other. Erica worshipped her father, and Raeburn's fatherhood was the truest, deepest, tenderest part of his character. No, human strength could not do it, but—

'I am; nyle ye drede!'

His eye fell on a little illuminated scroll above his mantel-piece, Wyclif's rendering of Christ's reassuring word to the fearful disciples. Yes, with the revelation of Himself, He would give the strength, make it possible to dread nothing, not even the infliction of grief to one's nearest and dearest. Much pain, much sacrifice there would be in His service, but dread—never! The strength of the 'I am,' bade it for ever cease. In that strength the weakest could conquer.

But he had wandered on into a dim future, had pictured a struggle which in all probability would not take place. Even were that the

case, however, he needed these words of assurance all the more himself. They wove themselves into his reverie as he paced to and fro: they led him further and further away from perplexed surmises as to the future of Raeburn and Erica, but closer to their souls, because they took him straight to the 'God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.'

The next morning, as he was preparing a sermon for the following Sunday, there came a knock at his study door. His brother came in. He was a fine looking man of two or three and fifty.

'I can't stay,' he said, 'I've a long round, but I just looked in to tell you about your little heretic.'

Charles Osmond looked up anxiously.

'It is as you thought,' continued his brother. 'Slight curvature of the spine. She's a brave little thing; I don't wonder you are interested in her.'

'It means a long rest, I suppose?'

'Yes, I told her a year in a recumbent pos-

ture ; for I fancy she is one of those restless beings who will do nothing at all unless you are pretty plain with them. It is possible that six or eight months may be sufficient.'

'How did she take it ?'

'Oh, in the pluckiest way you can conceive! Tried to laugh at the prospect, wanted me to measure her to see how much she grew in the time, said she should expect at least three inches to reward her.'

'A Raeburn could hardly be deficient in courage. Luke Raeburn is without exception the bravest man I ever met.'

'And I'd back his daughter against any woman I know,' said the doctor.

He left the room, but the news he had brought caused a long pause in his brother's sermon.

CHAPTER XII.

RAEBURN'S HOME-COMING.

> He is a man both loving and severe,
> A tender heart, a will inflexible.
>
> LONGFELLOW.

LUKE RAEBURN had been lecturing in one of the large manufacturing towns. It was the hottest part of a sultry day in June. He was returning home, and sat in a broiling third-class carriage reading a paper. Apparently what he read was the reverse of gratifying, for there was a look of annoyance on his usually serene face; he was displeased with the report of his lecture given in the local papers, it was calculated to mislead very greatly.

Other matters, too, were harassing him just

then, and he was, moreover, paying the penalty of his two years' campaign, in which his almost superhuman exertions and the privations he had voluntarily endured had told severely upon his health. Possessed of a singularly well-regulated mind, and having in an unusual degree the inestimable gift of common-sense, he nevertheless often failed to use it in his personal affairs. He had no idea of sparing himself, no idea of husbanding his strength; this was indeed great, but he treated himself as if it were inexhaustible. The months of trouble had turned his hair quite white, he was now a more noticeable-looking man than ever.

Not unfrequently he made friends with the men with whom he travelled; he was always studying life from the working-man's point of view, and there was such a charm in his genial manner and ready sympathy that he invariably succeeded in drawing people out. But on this day he was not in the humour for it; instead, he thought over the abusive article and the mangled report in the *Longstaff Mercury*, and debated within himself whether it were worth an

action for libel. His love of fighting said yes, his common-sense said no, and in the end common-sense won the day, but left him doubly depressed. He moved to the shady side of the carriage and looked out of the window. He was a great lover of Nature, and Nature was looking her loveliest just then. The trees, in all the freshness of early June, lifted their foliage to the bluest of skies, the meadows were golden with buttercups, the cattle grazed peacefully, the hay-fields waved unmown in the soft summer air, which, though sparing no breath for the hot and dusty travellers, was yet strong enough to sweep over the tall grasses in long undulating waves that made them shimmer in the sunlight.

Raeburn's face grew serene once more; he had a very quick perception of the beautiful. Presently he retired again behind a newspaper, this time the *Daily Review*, and again his brow grew stern, for there was bad news from the seat of war; he read the account of a great battle, read the numbers of his slain countrymen, and of those who had fallen on the

enemy's side. It was an unrightous war, and his heart burnt within him at the thought of the inhuman havoc thus caused by a false ambition. Again, as if he were fated that day to be confronted with the dark side of life, the papers gave a long account of a discovery made in some charity school, where young children had been hideously ill-treated. Raeburn, who was the most fatherly of men, could hardly restrain the expression of his righteous indignation. All this mismanagement, this reckless waste of life, this shameful cruelty, was going on in what was called 'Free England.' And here was he, a middle-aged man, and time was passing on with frightful rapidity, and, though he had never lost an opportunity of lifting up his voice against oppression, how little had he actually accomplished!

> 'So many worlds, so much to do,
> So little done, such things to be!'

That was the burden of the unuttered cry which filled his whole being. That was the point where his atheism often brought him to a noble despair. But far from prompting him to

repeat the maxim—'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!' it spurred him on rather to a sort of fiery energy, never satisfied with what it had accomplished. Neither the dissatisfaction, however, nor even the despair ever made him feel the *need* of any power above man. On the contrary, the unaccountable mystery of pain and evil was his strongest argument against the existence of a God. Upon that rock he had foundered as a mere boy, and no argument had ever been able to reconvince him. Impatience of present ill had in this, as in many other cases, proved the bane of his life.

He would write and speak about these cases of injustice, he would hold them up to the obloquy they so richly deserved.

Scathing sentences already took shape in his brain, but deeper investigation would be necessary before he could write anything. In the meantime to cool himself, to bring himself into a judicial frame of mind, he took a Hebrew book from his bag, and spent the rest of the journey in hard study.

Harassed, and tired, and out of spirits as he

was, he nevertheless felt a certain pleasurable sensation as he left St. Pancras, driving homeward through the hot crowded streets. Erica would be waiting for him at home, and he had a comparatively leisure afternoon. There was the meeting on the Opium Trade at eight, but he might take her for a turn in one of the parks beforehand. She had always been a companion to him since her very babyhood, but now he was able to enjoy her companionship even more than in the olden times. Her keen intellect, her ready sympathy, her eagerness to learn, made her the perfection of a disciple, while not unnaturally he delighted in tracing the many similarities of character between himself and his child. Then, too, in his hard, argumentative, fighting life it was an unspeakable relief to be able to retire every now and then into a home which no outer storms could shake or disturb. Fond as he was of his sister, Mrs. Craigie, and Tom, they constituted rather the innermost circle of his friends and followers; it was Erica who made the *Home* though the others shared the house. It was to Erica's

pure childlike devotion that he invariably turned for comfort.

Dismissing the cab at the corner of Guilford Square, he walked down the dreary little passage, looking up at the window to see if she were watching for him as usual. But to-day there was no expectant face; he recollected, however, that it was Thursday, always a busy day with them.

He opened the door with his latch-key and went in; still there was no sound in the house; he half-paused for an instant, thinking that he should certainly hear quick footsteps, the opening of a door, some sign of welcome, but all was as silent as death. Half angry with himself for having grown so expectant of that loving watch as to be seriously apprehensive at its absence, he hastily put down his bag and walked into the sitting-room, his calm exterior belying a nameless fear at his heart.

What the French call expressively a '*serrement de cœur*' seized him when he saw that Erica was indeed at home, but that she was lying on

the couch. She did not even spring up to greet him.

'Is anything the matter, dear? Are you ill?' he asked, hurriedly crossing the little room.

'Oh, have you not seen Aunt Jean? she was going to meet you at St. Pancras,' said Erica, her heart failing her a little at the prospect of telling her own bad news. But the exceeding anxiety of her father's face helped her to rise to the occasion. She laughed, and the laugh was natural enough to reassure him.

'It is nothing so very dreadful, and all this time you have never even given me a kiss, father.' She drew down the grand-looking white head, and pressed her fair face to his. He sat down beside her.

'Tell me, dear, what is wrong with you,' he repeated.

'Well, I felt rather out of order, and they said I ought to see some one, and it seems that my tiresome spine is getting crooked, and the long and the short of it is that Mr. Doctor Osmond says I shall get quite well again if I'm careful; but'—she added, lightly, yet with the

gentleness of one who thinks merely of the hearer's point of view,—'I shall have to be a passive verb for a year, and you will have to be my "Very strong man, Kwasind." '

'A year!' he exclaimed, in dismay.

'Brian half gave me hope that it might not be so long,' said Erica, 'if I'm very good and careful, and of course I shall be both. I am only sorry because it will make me very useless. I did hope I should never have been a burden on you again, father.'

'Don't talk of such a thing, my little son Eric,' he said, very tenderly. 'Who should take care of you if not your own father. Besides, if you never wrote another line for me, you would help me by just being yourself. A burden!'

'Well, I've made you look as grave as half-a-dozen law-suits!' said Erica, pretending to stroke the lines of care from his forehead. 'I've had the morning to ruminate over the prospect, and really, now that you know, it is not so very dreadful. A year will soon pass.'

'I look to you, Eric,' said her father. 'To

show the world that we Secularists know how to bear pain. You won't waste the year, if you can do it.'

Her face lighted up.

'It was like you to think of that!' she said, 'that would indeed be worth doing.'

Still, do what she would, Erica could not talk him back to cheerfulness. He was terribly distressed at her news, and more so when he found that she was suffering a good deal. He thought with a pang of the difference of the reality to his expectations. No walk for them in the park that evening, nor probably for many years to come! Yet he was ignorant of these matters, perhaps he exaggerated the danger or the duration; he would go across and see Brian Osmond at once!

Left once more to herself, the colour died out of Erica's cheeks; she lay there pale and still, but her face was almost rigid with resoluteness.

'I am not going to give way!' she thought to herself. 'I won't shed a single tear. Tears are wasteful luxuries, bad for body and mind. And yet—yet—oh, it is hard, just when I want-

ed to help father most! Just when I wanted to keep him from being worried! And a whole year! How shall I bear it, when even six hours has seemed half a life-time! This is what Thekla would call a cross, but I only call it my horrid, stupid, idiotic old spine! Well, I must try to show them that Luke Raeburn's daughter knows how to bear pain: I must be patient, however much I boil over in private. Yet is it honest, I wonder, to keep a patient outside, while inside you are all one big grumble? Rather Pharisaical—outside of the cup and platter; but it is all I shall be able to do, I'm sure. That is where Mr. Osmond's Christianity would come in; I do believe that goes right through his life, privatest thoughts and all. Odd, that a delusion should have such power, and over such a man! There is Sir Michael Cunningham, too, one of the greatest and best men in England, yet a Christian! Great intellects and much study, and still they remain Christians—'tis extraordinary. But a Christian would have the advantage over me in a case like this. First of all, I suppose, they would

feel that they could serve their God as well on their backs as upright, while all the help I shall be able to give the cause is dreadfully indirect and problematical. Then certainly they would feel that they might be getting ready for the next world where all wrong is, they believe, to be set right, while I am only terribly hindered in getting ready for this world,—a whole year without the chance of a lecture! And then they have all kinds of nice theories about pain, discipline, and that sort of thing, which no doubt make it more bearable, while to me it is just the one unmitigated evil. But oh! they don't know what pain means! for there is no death to them—no endless separation. What a delusion it is! they ought to be happy enough. Oh, mother! mother!'

After all, what she really dreaded in her enforced pause was the leisure for thought. She had plunged into work of all kinds, had half killed herself with work, had tried to hold her despair at arms' length. But now there was no help for it. She must rest, and the thoughts must come.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOSING ONE FRIEND TO GAIN ANOTHER.

> For toleration had its griefs,
> And charity its trial.
>
> WHITTIER.

'WELL, Osmond, you got into hot water a few years ago for defending Raeburn in public, and by this time you will find it not merely hot, but up to boiling point. The fellow is more notorious than ever.'

The speaker was one of Charles Osmond's college friends, a certain Mr. Roberts, who had been abroad for a good many years, but, having returned on account of his health, had for a few months been acting as curate to his friend.

'A man who works as indefatigably as Mr. Raeburn has done can hardly avoid being noticed,' replied Charles Osmond.

'You speak as if you admired the fellow!'

'There is a great deal to admire in Mr. Raeburn. However greatly mistaken he is, there is no doubt that he is a brave man, and an honest.'

'You can speak in such a way of a man who makes his living by speaking and writing against God!'

'I hope I can speak the truth of every man, whether his creed agrees with mine or not.'

'A man who grows rich on blasphemy! who sows poison among the people and reaps the harvest!' exclaimed Mr. Roberts.

'That he teaches fearful error, I quite allow,' said Charles Osmond, 'but it is the grossest injustice to say that he does it for gain. His atheism brought him to the very brink of starvation some years ago. Even now, he is so crippled by the endless litigation he has had that he lives in absolute penury.'

'But that letter you sent to the *Church Chronicle* was so uncalled for, you put the comparison so broadly.'

'I put it in plain English,' said Charles

Osmond, 'I merely said, as I think, that he puts many of us to shame by his great devotion. The letter was a reply to a very unfair article about the Rilchester riot; it was absolutely necessary that some one should speak. I tell you, Roberts, if you knew the man, you could not speak so bitterly of him. It is not true that he leads a selfish, easy-going life; he has spent thousands and thousands of pounds in the defence of his cause. I don't believe there is a man in England who has led a more self-denying life. It may be very uncomfortable news for us, but we've no right to shut our ears to it. I wish that man could stir up an honest sense of shame in every sleepy Christian in the country. I believe that, indeed, to be his rightful misson. Raeburn is a grand text for a sermon which the nation sorely needs. "Here is a man who spends his whole strength in propagating his so-called gospel of atheism. Do you spend your whole strength in spreading the gospel of Christ? Here is a man, willing to leave his home, willing to live without one single luxury,

denying himself all that is not necessary to actual health. Have you ever denied yourself anything? Here is a man who spends his whole living—all that he has—on what he believes to be the truth. What meagre tithe do you bestow upon the religion of which you speak so much? Here is a man who dares to stand up alone in defence of what he holds true, a man who never flinches. How far are you brave in the defence of your faith? Do you never keep a prudent silence? Do you never howl with the wolves?'"

'Thank heaven you are not in the pulpit!' ejaculated Mr. Roberts.

'I wish those words could be sent through the length and breadth of the land,' said Charles Osmond.

'No doubt Mr. Raeburn would thank you,' said his friend, with a sharp-edged smile. 'It would be a nice little advertisement for him. Why, from a Church of England parson it would make his fortune! My dear Osmond, you are the best fellow in the world, but don't you see that you are playing into the enemy's hands.'

'I am trying to speak the words that God has given me to speak,' said Charles Osmond. 'The result I can well trust to Him. An uncomfortable truth will never be popular. The words of our Lord Himself were not popular; but they sank into men's hearts and bore fruit, though He was put to death as a blasphemer and a revolutionary.'

'Well, at least then, if you must take up the cudgels in his defence, do not dishonour the clerical profession by personal acquaintance with the man. I hear that he has been seen actually in your house, that you are even intimate with his family.'

'Roberts, I didn't think our beliefs were so very different, in fact, I used to think we were nearer to each other on these points than most men. Surely we both own the universal Fatherhood of God?'

'Of course, of course,' said Mr. Roberts, quickly.

'And owning that, we cannot help owning the universal brotherhood of men. Why should you then cut yourself off from your brother, Luke Raeburn?'

'He's no brother of mine!' said Mr. Roberts, in a tone of disgust.

Charles Osmond smiled.

'We do not choose our brothers, we have no voice in the growth of the family. There they are.'

'But the man says there is no God!'

'Excuse me, he has never said that. What he says is, that the word God conveys no meaning to him. If you think that the best way to show your belief in the All-Father and your love to all His children lies in refusing so much as to touch those who don't know Him, you are of course justified in shunning every atheist or agnostic in the world. But I do not think that the best way. It was not Christ's way. Therefore I hail every possible opportunity of meeting Mr. Raeburn or his colleagues, try to find all the points we have in common, try as far as possible to meet them on their own ground.'

'And the result will be that people will call you an atheist yourself!' broke in Mr. Roberts.

'That would not greatly matter,' said Charles Osmond. 'It would be a mere sting for the moment. It is not what men call us that we have to consider, but how we are fulfilling the work God has given us to do.'

''Pon my life, it makes me feel sick to hear you talk like this about that miserable Raeburn!' exclaimed Mr. Roberts hotly. 'I tell you, Osmond, that you are ruining your reputation, losing all chance of preferment, just because of this mistaken zeal. It makes me furious to think that such a man as you should suffer for such a creature as Raeburn.'

'Have you forgotten that such creatures as you and I and Luke Raeburn had such a Saviour as Jesus Christ? Come, Roberts, in your heart you know you agree with me. If one is indeed our Father, then indeed we are all brethren.'

'I do not hold with you!' retorted Mr. Roberts, the more angrily because he had really hoped to convince his friend. 'I wouldn't sit in the same room with the fellow, if you offered me the richest living in England! I wouldn't

shake hands with him to be made an archbishop! I wouldn't touch him with a pair of tongs!'

'Even less charitable than St. Dunstan to the devil,' said Charles Osmond, smiling a little but sadly. 'Except in that old legend, however, I don't think Christianity ever mentions tongs. If you can't love your enemies, and pray for them, and hold out a brotherly hand to them, perhaps it were indeed better to hold aloof and keep as quiet as you can.'

'It is clearly impossible for us to work together any longer, Osmond,' said Mr. Roberts, rising. 'I am sorry that such a cause should separate us, but if you will persist in visiting an outcast of society, a professed atheist, the most bitter enemy of our church, I cannot allow my name to be associated with yours,—it is impossible that I should hold office under you.'

So the two friends parted.

Charles Osmond was human, and almost inevitably a sort of reaction began in his mind the instant he was alone. He had lost one of his best friends, he knew as well as possible

that they could never be on the same footing as before. He had, moreover, lost in him a valuable co-worker. Then, too, it was true enough that his defence of Raeburn was bringing him into great disfavour with the religious world, and he was a sensitive and naturally a proud man, who found blame, and reproach, and contemptuous disapproval very hard to bear. Years of hard fighting, years of patient imitation of Christ, had wonderfully ennobled him; but he had not yet attained to the sublime humility which, being free from all thought of self, cares nothing, scarcely even pauses to think of the world's judgment, too absorbed in the work of the Highest to have leisure for thought of the lowest, too full of love for the race to have love to spare for self. To this ideal he was struggling, but he had not yet reached it, and the thought of his own reputation, his own feelings, would creep in. He was not a selfishly ambitious man, but every one who is conscious of ability, everyone who feels within him energies lying fallow for want of opportunity, must be ambitious for a larger

sphere of work. Just as he was beginning to dare to allow himself the hope of some change in his work, some wider field, just as he was growing sure enough of himself to dare to accept any greater work which might have been offered him, he must, by bringing himself into evil repute, lose every chance of preferment. And for what? For attempting to obtain a just judgment for the enemy of his faith; for holding out a brotherly hand to a man who might very probably not care to take it; for consorting with those who would at best regard him as an amiable fanatic. Was this worth all it would cost? Could the exceedingly problematical gain make up for the absolutely certain loss?

He took up the day's newspaper. His eye was at once attracted to a paragraph headed, 'Mr. Raeburn at Longstaff.' The report, sent from the same source as the report in the *Longstaff Mercury*, which had so greatly displeased Raeburn that morning, struck Charles Osmond in a most unfavourable light. This bitter opponent of Christianity, this unsparing

denouncer of all that he held most sacred, *this* was the man for whom he was sacrificing friendship, reputation, advancement. A feeling of absolute disgust rose within him. For a moment the thought came, 'I can't have any more to do with the man.'

But he was too honest not to detect almost at once his own Pharisaical, un-Christlike spirit.

'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.'

He had been selfishly consulting his own happiness, his own ease. Worse still, he, of all men in the world, had dared to set himself up as too virtuous forsooth to have anything to do with an atheist. Was that the mind which was in Christ? Was He a strait-laced, self-righteous Pharisee, too good, too religious to have anything to say to those who disagreed with Him? Did He not live and die for those who were yet enemies to God? Was not the work of reconciliation the work He came for? Did He calcu-

late the loss to Himself, the risk of failure? Ah, no, those who would imitate God must first give as a free gift, without thought of self, perfect love to all, perfect justice through that love, or else they are not like the Father who 'maketh His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'

Charles Osmond paced to and fro, the look of trouble gradually passing from his face. Presently he paused beside the open window; it looked upon the little back garden, a tiny strip of ground indeed, but just now bright with sunshine and fresh with the beauty of early summer. The sunshine seemed to steal into his heart as he prayed.

'All-Father, drive out my selfish cowardice, my self-righteous conceit. Give me Thy spirit of perfect love to all, give me Thy pure hatred of sin. Melt my coldness with Thy burning charity, and if it be possible make me fit to be Luke Raeburn's friend.'

While he still stood by the window a visitor was announced. He had been too much absorbed to catch the name, but it seemed the

most natural thing that on turning round he should find himself face to face with the prophet af atheism.

There he stood, a splendid specimen of humanity; every line in his rugged Scottish face bespoke a character of extraordinary force, but the eyes which in public Charles Osmond had seen flashing with the fire of the man's enthusiasm, or gleaming with a cold metallic light which indicated exactly his steely endurance of ill-treatment, were now softened and deepened by sadness. His heart went out to him. Already he loved the man, only hitherto the world's opinion had crept into his heart between each meeting, and had paralysed the free God-like love. But it was to do so no longer. That afternoon he had dealt it a final blow, there was no more any room for it to rear its fair-speaking form, no longer should its veiled selfishness, its so-called virtuous indignation turn him into a Pharisaical judge.

He received him with a hand-shake which conveyed to Raeburn much of the warmth, the reality, the friendliness of the man. He had

always liked Charles Osmond, but he had generally met him either in public, or when he was harassed and pre-occupied. Now, when he was at leisure, when, too, he was in great trouble, he instinctively perceived that Osmond had in a rare degree the broad-hearted sympathy which he was just now in need of. From that minute a life-long friendship sprang up between the two men.

'I came really to see your son,' said Raeburn, 'but they tell me he is out. I want to know the whole truth about Erica.'

It was not his way to speak very much where he felt deeply, but Charles Osmond could detect all the deep anxiety, the half-indulged hope which lay hidden behind the strong reserved exterior. He had heard enough of the case to be able to satisfy him, to assure him that there was no danger, that all must be left to time and patience and careful observance of the doctor's regulations. Raeburn sighed with relief at the repeated assurance that there was no danger, that recovery was only a question of time. Death had so recently visited his

home that a grisly fear had taken possession of his heart. Once free of that, he could speak almost cheerfully of the lesser evil.

'It will be a great trial to her, such absolute imprisonment; she is never happy unless she is hard at work. But she is brave and strong-willed. Will you look in and see her when you can?'

'Certainly,' said Charles Osmond. 'We must do our best to keep up her spirits.'

'Yes, luckily she is a great reader, otherwise such a long rest would be intolerable, I should fancy.'

'You do not object to my coming to see her?' said Charles Osmond, looking full into his companion's eyes. 'You know that we discuss religious questions pretty freely.'

'Religious questions always are freely discussed in my house,' said Raeburn. 'It will be the greatest advantage to her to have to turn things well over in her mind. Besides, we always make a point of studying our adversaries' case even more closely than our own, and, if she has a chance of doing it per-

sonally as well as through books, all the better.'

'But supposing that such an unlikely thing were to happen as that she should see reason to change her present views? Supposing, if you can suppose anything so unlikely, she should ever in future years come to believe in Christianity?'

Raeburn smiled, not quite pleasantly.

'It is as you say such a very remote contingency!' He paused, grew grave, then continued with all his native nobility: 'Yet I like you the better for having brought forward such an idea, improbable as I hope it may be considered. I feel very sure of Erica. She has thought a great deal, she has had every possible advantage. We never teach on authority; she has been left perfectly free and has learned to weigh evidences and probabilities, not to be led astray by any emotional fancies but to be guided by reason. She has always heard both sides of the case; she has lived as it were in an atmosphere of debate, and has been, and of course always will be, quite free to form her own opinion on every subject. It is not for nothing

that we call ourselves Freethinkers. Absolute freedom of thought and speech is part of our creed. So far from objecting to your holding free discussions with my daughter, I shall be positively grateful to you, and particularly just now. I fancy Erica has inherited enough of my nature to enjoy nothing better than a little opposition.'

'I know you are a born fighter,' said Charles Osmond. 'We sympathise with each other in that. And, next to the bliss of a hard-won victory, I place the satisfaction of being well conquered.'

Raeburn laughed.

'I am glad we think alike there. People are very fond of describing me as a big bull-dog, but if they would think a little they would see that the love of overcoming obstacles is deeply rooted in the heart of every true man. What is the meaning of our English love of field sports? What the explanation of the mania for Alpine climbings? It is no despicable craving for distinction, it is the innate love of fighting, struggling, and conquering.'

'Well, there are many obstacles which we can struggle to remove side by side,' said Charles Osmond. 'We should be like one man, I fancy, on the question of the opium trade, for instance.'

In a few vigorous words Raeburn denounced this monstrous national sin.

'Are you going to the meeting to-night?' he added, after a pause.

'Yes, I had thought of it. Let us go together. Shall you speak?'

'Not to-night,' said Raeburn, a smile flickering about his usually stern lips. 'The Right Reverend Father, &c., &c., who is to occupy the chair, might object to announcing that "Mr Raeburn would now address the meeting." No, this is not the time or place for me. So prejudiced are people that the mere connection of my name with the question would probably do more harm than good. I should like, I confess, to get up without introduction, to speak not from the platform but from among the audience incognito. But that is impossible for a man who has the misfortune to be five inches above

the average height, and whose white hair has become a proverb, since some one made the unfortunate remark, repeated in a hundred newspapers, that the "hoary head was only a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness."'

Charles Osmond could not help laughing.

'The worst of these newspaper days is that one never can make an end of anything. That remark has been made to me since at several meetings. At the last, I told the speaker that I was so tired of comments on my personal appearance that I should soon have to resort either to the dyer or the wig-maker. But here am I wasting your time and my own, and forgetting the poor little maid at home. Good-bye. I'll call in passing, then, at a quarter to eight. Tom Craigie will probably be with me, he is very rabid on the subject.'

'Craigie and I are quite old friends,' said Charles Osmond.

And then, as on the preceding night he had stood at the door while Erica crossed the square, so now involuntarily his eyes followed

Raeburn. In his very walk the character of the man was indicated :—firm, steady, imperturbable, straight-forward.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLES OSMOND SPEAKS HIS MIND.

Fiat justitia ruat cœlum.

Proverb.

Justice,—the miracle worker amongst men.

JOHN BRIGHT (July 14, 1868.)

'I THOUGHT you were never coming to see me,' said Erica, putting down a newspaper and looking up with eager welcome at Charles Osmond, who had just been announced.

'It has not been for want of will,' he replied, sitting down near her couch, 'but I have been overwhelmed with work the last few days. How are you getting on? I am glad you don't altogether refuse to see your prophet of evil.'

'It would have been worse if you hadn't spoken,' she said, in the tone of one trying

hard to make the best of things. 'I was rather rash though to say that I should like my wheels to run down; I didn't know how terrible it is to be still. One does so grudge all the lost time.'

'But you will not let this be lost time—you will read.'

'Oh, yes, happily I can do that. And Mrs. McNaughton is going to give me physiology lessons, and dear old Professor Gosse has promised to come and teach me whenever he can. He is so devoted to father, you know, I think he would do anything for me just because I am his child. It is a comfort that father has so many real good friends. What I do so thoroughly hate is the thought of having to be a passive verb for so long. You've no idea how aggravating it is to lie here and listen to all that is going on, to hear of great meetings and not to be able to go, to hear of work to be done and not to be able to do it. And I suppose one notices little things more when one is ill, for just to lie still and watch our clumsy little servant lay the table for dinner, clattering

down the knives and forks and tossing down the plates, makes me actually cross! And then they let the room get so untidy; just look at that stack of books for reviewing, and that chaos of papers in the corner! If I could but get up for just five minutes, I shouldn't mind.'

'Poor child,' said Charles Osmond, 'this comes very hard on you.'

'I know I'm grumbling dreadfully, but if you knew how horrid it is to be cut off from everything! And, of course, it happens that another controversy is beginning about that Longstaff report. I have been reading half-a-dozen of to-day's newspapers, and each one is worse than the last. Look here! Just read that, and try to imagine it's your father they are slandering! Oh, if I could but get up for one minute and stamp!'

'And is this untrue?' asked Charles Osmond, when he had finished the account in question.

'There is just enough truth in it to make it worse than a direct lie,' said Erica, hotly. 'They have quoted his own words, but in a sense in which he never meant them, or they

have quite disregarded the context. If you will give me those books on the table, I'll just show you how they have misrepresented him by hacking out single sentences, and twisting and distorting all he says in public.'

Charles Osmond looked at the passages referred to, and saw that Erica had not complained without reason.

'Yes, that is very unfair—shamefully unfair,' he said. Then, after a pause, he added abruptly, 'Erica, are you good at languages?'

'I am very fond of them,' she said, surprised at the sudden turn he had given to the conversation.

'Supposing that Mr. Raeburn's speeches and doings were a good deal spoken of in Europe, as no doubt they are, and that a long time after his death one of his successors made some converts to secularism in Italy, and wrote in Italian all that he could remember of the life and words of his late teacher. Then suppose that the Italian life of Raeburn was translated into Chinese, and that hundreds of years after, a Heathen Chinee sat down to read it. His

Oriental mind found it hard to understand Mr. Raeburn's thoroughly Western mind; he didn't see anything noble in Mr. Raeburn's character, couldn't understand his mode of thought, read through the life, perhaps studied it after a fashion, or believed he did; then shut it up, and said there might possibly have been such a man, but the proofs were very weak, and, even if he had lived, he didn't think he was any great shakes, though the people did make such a fuss about him. Would you call that Heathen Chinee fair?'

Erica could not help smiling, though she saw what he was driving at.

But Charles Osmond felt much too keenly to continue in such a light strain. He was no weak-minded, pleasant conversationalist, but a prophet, who knew how to speak hard truths sometimes.

'Erica,' he said, almost sternly, 'you talk much about those who quote your father's words unfairly; but have you never misquoted the words of Christ? You deny Him and disbelieve in Him, yet you have never really studied

His life. You have read the New Testament through a veil of prejudice. Mind, I am not saying one word in defence of those so-called Christians who treat you unfairly or uncharitably; but I do say that, as far as I can see, you are quite as unfair to Christ as they are to your father. Of course, you may reply that Jesus of Nazareth lived nearly nineteen hundred years ago, and that your father is still living; that you have many difficulties and doubts to combat, while our bigots can verify every fact or quotation with regard to Mr. Raeburn with perfect ease and certainty. That is true enough. But the difficulties, if honestly faced, might be surmounted. You don't honestly face them; you say to yourself, "I have gone into all these matters carefully, and now I have finally made up my mind; there is an end of the matter!" You are naturally prejudiced against Christ; every day your prejudices will deepen unless you strike out resolutely for yourself as a truth-seeker, as one who insists on always considering all sides of the question. At present you are absolutely unfair, you will not

take the trouble to study the life of Christ.'

Few people like to be told of their faults. Erica could just endure it from her father, but from no one else. She was, besides, too young yet to have learnt even the meaning of the word humility. Had Charles Osmond been a few years younger, she would not even have listened to him. As it was, he was a grey-haired man, whom she loved and revered; he was, moreover, a guest. She was very angry with him, but she restrained her anger.

He had watched her attentively while he spoke. She had at first only been surprised; then her anger had been kindled, and she gave him one swift flash from eyes which looked like live coals. Then she turned her face away from him, so that he could only see one crimson cheek. There was a pause after he had said his say. Presently, with a great effort, Erica faced him once more, and, in a manner which would have been dignified had it not been a trifle too frigid, made some casual remark upon a different subject. He saw that to stay longer was mere waste of time.

When the door had closed behind him, Erica's anger blazed up once more. That he should have dared to accuse her of unfairness! That he should have dared actually to rebuke her! If he had given her a good shaking, she could not have felt more hurt and ruffled. And then to choose this day of all others, just when life was so hard to her, just when she was condemned to a long imprisonment. It was simply brutal of him! If anyone had told her that he would do such a thing, she would not have believed them. He had said nothing of the sort to her before, though they had known each other so long; but, now that she was ill and helpless and unable to get away from him, he had seen fit to come and lecture her. Well, he was a parson! she might have known that sooner or later the horrid, tyrannical, priestly side of him would show! And yet she had liked him so much, trusted him so much! It was indescribably bitter to think that he was no longer the hero she had thought him to be. That, after all, he was not a grand, noble, self-denying man, but a fault-finding priest!

She spent the rest of the afternoon in alternate wrath and grief. In the evening Aunt Jean read her a somewhat dry book which required all her attention, and, consequently, her anger cooled for want of thoughts to stimulate it. Her father did not come in till late; but, as he carried her upstairs to bed, she told him of Charles Osmond's interview.

'I told him you liked a little opposition,' was his reply.

'I don't know about opposition, but I didn't like him, he showed his priestly side.'

'I am sorry,' replied Raeburn. 'For my part I genuinely like the man; he seems to me a grand fellow, and I should have said not in the least spoilt by his Christianity, for he is neither exclusive, nor narrow-minded, nor opposed to progress. Infatuated on one point, of course, but a thorough man in spite of it.'

Left once more alone in her little attic-room, Erica began to think over things more quietly. So her father had told him that she liked opposition, and he had doled out to her a rebuke which was absolutely unanswerable! But why

unanswerable? She had been too angry to reply at the time. It was one of the few maxims her father had given her, 'When you are angry be very slow to speak.' But she might write an answer, a nice, cold, cutting answer, respectful, of course, but very frigid. She would clearly demonstrate to him that she was perfectly fair, and that he, her accuser, was unfair.

And then, quite quietly, she began to turn over the accusations in her mind. Quoting the words of Christ without regard to the context, twisting their meaning. Neglecting real study of Christ's character and life. Seeing all through a veil of prejudice.

She would begin like her father with a definition of terms. What did he mean by study? What did she mean by study? Well, such searching analysis, for instance, as she had applied to the character of Hamlet, when she had had to get up one of Shakespeare's plays for her examination. She had worked very hard at that, had really taken every one of his speeches and soliloquies, and had tried to gather his true character from them as well as from his actions.

At this point she wandered away from the subject a little, and began to wonder when she should hear the result of the examination, and to hope that she might get a first. By-and-by she came to herself with a sudden and very uncomfortable shock. If the sort of work she had given to Hamlet was study, *had* she ever studied the character of Christ?

She had all her life heard what her father had to say against Him, and what a good many well-meaning, but not very convincing, people had to say for Him. She had heard a few sermons and several lectures on various subjects connected with Christ's religion. She had read many books both for and against Him. She had read the New Testament. But could she quite honestly say that she had *studied* the character of Christ? Had she not been predisposed to think her father in the right? He would not at all approve of that. Had she been a true Freethinker? Had she not taken a good deal to be truth because he said it? If so, she was not a bit more fair than the majority of Christians who never took the trouble to go into things for

themselves, and study things from the point of view of an outsider.

In the silence and darkness of her little room, she began to suspect a good many unpleasant and hitherto unknown facts about herself.

'After all, I do believe that Mr. Osmond was right,' she confessed at length. 'I am glad to get back my belief in him; but I've come to a horrid bit of lath and plaster in myself where I thought it was all good stone.'

She fell asleep and dreamt of the Heathen Chinee reading the translation of the translation of her father's words, and disbelieving altogether in 'that invented demagogue, Luke Raeburn.'

The next day, Charles Osmond, sitting at work in his study, and feeling more depressed and hopeless than he would have cared to own even to himself, was roused by the arrival of a little three-cornered note. It ran as follows:—

'DEAR MR. OSMOND,

'You made me very angry yesterday, and sad, too, for of course it was a case of "Et tu,

Brute." But last night I came to the unpleasant conclusion that you were quite right, and that I was quite wrong. To prove to you that I am no longer angry, I am going to ask you a great favour. Will you teach me Greek? Your parable of the Heathen Chinee has set me thinking.

'Yours very sincerely,

'ERICA RAEBURN.'

Charles Osmond felt the tears come to his eyes. The straightforward simplicity of the letter, the candid avowal of having been 'quite wrong,' an avowal not easy for one of Erica's character to make, touched him inexpressibly. Taking a Greek grammar from his bookshelves, he set off at once for Guilford Terrace.

He found Erica looking very white and fragile, and with lines of suffering about her mouth; but, though physically weary, her mind seemed as vigorous as ever. She received him with her usual frankness, and with more animation in her look than he had seen for some weeks.

'I did think you perfectly horrid yesterday!'

she exclaimed. 'And was miserable, besides, at the prospect of losing one of my heroes. You can be very severe.'

'The infliction of pain is only justified when the inflictor is certain, or as nearly certain as he can be, that the pain will be productive of good,' said Charles Osmond.

'I suppose that is the way you account for the origin of evil,' said Erica, thoughtfully.

'Yes,' replied Charles Osmond, pleased that she should have thought of the subject, 'that to me seems the only possible explanation, otherwise God would be either not perfectly good or not omnipotent. His all-wisdom enables Him to over-rule that pain which He has willed to be the necessary outcome of infractions of His order. Pain, you see, is made into a means of helping us to find out where that order has been broken, and so teaching us to obey it in the long run.'

'But if there is an all-powerful God, wouldn't it have been much better if He had made it impossible for us to go wrong?'

'It would have saved much trouble, un-

doubtedly; but do you think that which costs us least trouble is generally the most worth having? I know a noble fellow who has fought his way upward through sins and temptations—you would like him, by the way, for he was once an atheist. He is, by virtue of all he has passed through, all he has overcome, one of the finest men I have ever known.'

'That is the friend, I suppose, whom your son mentioned to me. But I don't see your argument, for if there were an all-powerful God He could have caused the man you speak of to be as noble and good without passing through pain and temptation.'

'But God does not work arbitrarily, but by laws of progression. Nor does His omnipotence include the working of contradictions. He cannot both cause a thing to be and not to be at the same time. If it is a law that that which has grown by struggle and effort shall be most noble, God will not arbitrarily reverse that law or truth because the creation of sinless beings would involve less trouble.'

'It all seems to me so unreal!' exclaimed

Erica. 'It seems like talking of thin air!'

'I expect it does,' said Charles Osmond, trying to realise to himself her position.

There was a silence.

'How did this man of whom you speak come to desert our side?' asked Erica. 'I suppose, as you say he was one of the finest men you ever knew, he must, at least, have had a great intellect. How did he begin to think all these unlikely, unreal things true?'

'Donovan began by seeing the grandeur of the character of Christ. He followed His example for many years, calling himself all the time an atheist; at last he realised that in Christ we see the Father.'

'I am sorry we lost him if he was such a nice man,' was Erica's sole comment. Then turning her beautiful eyes on Charles Osmond she said, 'I hope my note did not convey to you more than I intended. I asked you if you would teach me Greek, and I mean to try to study the character of Christ; but, quite to speak the truth, I don't really want to, I only do it because I see I have not been fair.'

'You do it for the sake of being a true truth-seeker, the best possible reason.'

'I thought you would think I was going to do it because I hoped to get something. I thought one of your strong points was that people must come in a state of need and expecting to be satisfied. I don't expect anything. I am only doing it for the sake of honesty and thoroughness. I don't expect any good at all.'

'Is it likely that you can expect when you know so little what is there? What can you bring better than a perfectly honest mind to the search? Erica, if I hadn't known that you were absolutely sincere, I should not have dared to give you the pain I gave you yesterday. It was my trust in your perfect sincerity which brought you that strong accusation. Even then it was a sore piece of work.'

'Did you mind it a little?' exclaimed Erica. But, directly she had spoken, she felt that the question was absurd, for she saw a look in Charles Osmond's eyes that made the word 'little' a mockery.

'What makes that man so loving?' she

thought to herself. 'He reminded me almost of father, yet I am no child of his, I am opposed to all that he teaches. I have spoken my mind out to him in a way which must sometimes have pained him. Yet he cares for me so much that it pained him exceedingly to give me pain yesterday!'

His character puzzled her. The loving breadth, the stern condemnation of whatever was not absolutely true, the disregard of what the world said, the hatred of shams, and, most puzzling of all, the often apparent struggle with himself, the unceasing effort to conquer his chief fault. Yet this noble, honest, intellectual man was labouring under a great delusion, a delusion which somehow gave him an extraordinary power of loving! Ah, no! it could not be his Christianity, though, which made him loving, for were not most Christians hard and bitter and narrow-minded?

'I wish,' she said, abruptly, 'you would tell me what makes you willing to be friends with us. I know well enough that the *Church Chronicle* has been punishing you for your

defence of my father, and that there must be a thousand disagreeables to encounter in your own set just because you visit us. Why do you come?'

'Because I care for you very much.'

'But you care, too, perhaps, for other people who will probably cut you for flying in the face of society and visiting social outcasts.'

'I don't think I can explain it to you yet,' he replied. 'You would only tell me, as you told me once before, that I was talking riddles to you. When you have read your Greek Testament and really studied the life of Christ, I think you will understand. In the meantime, St. Paul, I think, answers your question better than I could, but you wouldn't understand even his words, I fancy. There they are in the Greek,'—he opened a Testament and showed her a passage. 'I believe you would think the English almost as great gibberish as this looks to you in its unknown characters.'

'Do you advise everyone to learn Greek?'

'No: many have neither time nor ability, and those who are not apt at languages would spend their time more usefully over good tran-

slations I think. But you have time and brains, so I am very glad to teach you.'

'I am afraid I would much rather it were for any other purpose!' said Erica. 'I am somehow weary of the very name of Christianity. I have heard wrangling over the Bible till I am tired to death of it, and discussions about the Atonement, and the Incarnation, and the Resurrection, till the very words are hateful to me. I am afraid I shock you, but just put yourself in my place and imagine how you would feel. It is not even as if I had to debate the various questions; I have merely to sit and listen to a never-ending dispute.'

'You sadden me; but it is quite natural that you should be weary of such debates. I want you to realise, though, that in the stormy atmosphere of your father's lecture hall, in the din and strife of controversy, it is impossible that you should gain any true idea of Christ's real character. Put aside all thought of the dogmas you have been wearied with, and study the life of the Man.'

Then the lesson began. It proved a treat to both teacher and pupil. When Charles Osmond had left, Erica still worked on.

'I should like, at any rate, to spell out his riddle,' she thought to herself, turning back to the passage he had shown her. And letter by letter, and word by word, she made out the sentence, 'For the love of Christ constraineth us.'

Was *that* what had made him come? Why, that was the alleged reason for half the persecutions they met with! Did the love of Christ constrain Charles Osmond to be their friend, and at the same time constrain the clergy of X—— not many years before to incite the people to stone her father, and offer him every possible insult? Was it possible that the love of Christ constrained Mr. Osmond to endure contempt and censure on their behalf, and constrained Mr. Randolph to hire a band of roughs to interrupt her father's speeches?

'He is a grand exception to the general rule,' she said to herself. 'If there were many Christians like him, I should begin to think

there must be something more in Christianity than we thought. Well, if only to please him, I must try to study the New Testament over again, and as thoroughly as I can. No, not to please him, though, but for the sake of being perfectly honest. I would much rather be working at that new book of Tyndall's!'

CHAPTER XV.

AN INTERVAL.

How can man love but what he yearns to help?
R. Browning.

During the year of Erica's illness, Brian began to realise his true position towards her better than he had hitherto done. He saw quite well that any intrusion of his love, even any slight manifestation of it, might do untold harm. She was not ready for it yet—why, he could not have told.

The truth was, that his Undine, although in many respects a high-souled woman, was still in some respects a child. She would have been merely embarrassed by his love; she did not want it. She liked him very much as an acquaintance; he was to her Tom's friend, or her

doctor, or perhaps Mr. Osmond's son. In this way she liked him, was even fond of him, but as a lover he would have been a perplexing embarrassment.

He knew well enough that her frank liking boded ill for his future success; but, in spite of that, he could not help being glad to obtain any footing with her. It was something even to be 'Tom's friend Brian.' He delighted in hearing his name from her lips, although knowing that it was no good augury. He lived on from day to day, thinking very little of the doubtful future as long as he could serve her in the present. A reserved and silent man, devoted to his profession, and to practical science of every kind, few people guessed that he could have any particular story of his own. He was not at all the sort of man who would be expected to fall hopelessly in love at first sight, nor would anyone have selected him as a good modern specimen of the chivalrous knight of olden times; he was so completely a nineteenth century man, so progressive, so scientific. But, though his devotion was of the silent order, it

was, perhaps for that reason, all the truer. There was about him a sort of divine patience. As long as he could serve Erica, he was content to wait any number of years in the hope of winning her love. He accepted his position readily. He knew that she had not the slightest love for him. He was quite secondary to his father, even, who was one of Erica's heroes. He liked to make her talk of him; her enthusiastic liking was delightful—perhaps all the more so because she was far from agreeing with her prophet. Brian, with the wonderful self-forgetfulness of true love, liked to hear the praises of all those whom she admired; he liked to realise what were her ideals, even when conscious how far he fell short of them.

For it was unfortunately true that his was not the type of character she was most likely to admire. As a friend she might like him much, but he could hardly be her hero. His wonderful patience was quite lost upon her; she hardly counted patience as a virtue at all. His grand humility merely perplexed her; it was at present far beyond her comprehension. While his

willingness to serve everyone, even in the most trifling and petty concerns of daily life, she often attributed to mere good nature. Grand acts of self-sacrifice she admired enthusiastically, but the more really difficult round of small denials and trifling services she did not in the least appreciate. Absorbed in the contemplation, as it were, of the Hamlets in life, she had no leisure to spare for the Horatios.

She proved a capital patient; her whole mind was set on getting well, and her steady common-sense and obedience to rules made her a great favourite with her elder doctor. Really healthy, and only invalided by the hard work and trouble she had undergone, seven or eight months' rest did wonders for her. In the enforced quiet, too, she found plenty of time for study. Charles Osmond had never had a better pupil. They learnt to know each other very well during those lessons, and many were the perplexing questions which Erica started. But they were not as before a mere repetition of the difficulties she had been primed with at her father's lecture-hall, nor did she bring them

forward with the triumphant conviction that they were unanswerable. They were real, honest questions, desiring and seeking everywhere for the true answer which might be somewhere.

The result of her study of the life of Christ was at first to make her a much better Secularist. She found to her surprise that there was much in His teaching that entirely harmonised with Secularism; that, in fact, He spoke a great deal about the improvement of this world, and scarcely at all about that place in the clouds of which Christians made so much. By the end of a year she had also reached the conviction that, whatever interpolations there might be in the gospels, no untrue writer, no admiring but dishonest narrator, *could* have conceived such a character as that of Christ. For she had dug down to the very root of the matter. She had left for the present the, to her, perplexing and almost irritating catalogue of miracles, and had begun to perceive the strength and indomitable courage, the grand self-devotion, the all-embracing love of the Man. Very superficial had

been her former view. He had been to her a shadowy, unreal being, soft and gentle, even a little effeminate, speaking sometimes what seemed to her narrow words about only saving the lost sheep of the house of Israel. A character somehow wanting in that Power and Intellect which she worshipped.

But on a really deep study she saw how greatly she had been mistaken. Extraordinarily mistaken, both as to the character and the teaching. Christ was without doubt a grand ideal! To be as broad-hearted as he was, as universally loving—it would be no bad aim! And, as in daily life Erica realised how hard was the practice of that love, she realised at the same time the loftiness of the ideal, and the weakness of her own powers.

'But, though I do begin to see why you take this man as your ideal,' she said, one day, to Charles Osmond, 'I cannot, of course, accept a great deal that He is said to have taught. When He speaks of love to men, that is understandable, one can try to obey; but when He speaks about God, then, of course, I can only think that He

was deluded. You may admire Joan of Arc, and see the great beauty of her character, yet at the same time believe that she was acting under a delusion; you may admire the character of Gotama without considering Buddhism the true religion; and so with Christ, I may reverence and admire His character while believing Him to have been mistaken.'

Charles Osborn smiled. He knew from many trifling signs, unnoticed by others, that Erica would have given a great deal to see her way to an honest acceptance of that teaching of Christ which spoke of an unseen but everywhere present Father of all, of the everlastingness of love, of a reunion with those who are dead. She hardly allowed to herself that she longed to believe it, she dreaded the least concession to that natural craving, she distrusted her own truthfulness, feared above all things that she might be deluded, might imagine that to be true which was in reality false.

And, happily, her prophet was too wise to attempt in any way to quicken the work which was going on within her; he was one of

those rare men who can be, even in such a case, content to wait. He would as soon have thought of digging up a seed to see whether he could not quicken its slow development of root and stem, as of interfering in any way with Erica. He came and went, taught her Greek, and always, day after day, week after week, month after month, however much pressed by his parish work, however harassed by private troubles, he came to her with the genial sympathy, the broad-hearted readiness to hear calmly all sides of the question, which had struck Erica so much the very first time she had met him.

The other members of the family liked him almost as well, although they did not know him so intimately as Erica. Aunt Jean, who had at first been a little prejudiced against him, ended by singing his praises more loudly than anyone, perhaps conquered in spite of herself by the man's extraordinary power of sympathy, his ready perception of good even in those with whom he disagreed most.

Mrs. Craigie was in many respects very like

her brother, and was a very useful worker, though much of her work was little seen. She did not speak in public; all the oratorical powers of the family seemed to have concentrated themselves in Luke Raeburn; but she wrote and worked indefatigably, proving a very useful second to her brother. A hard, wearing life, however, had told a good deal upon her, and trouble had somewhat embittered her nature. She had not the vein of humour which had stood Raeburn in such good stead. Severely matter-of-fact, and almost despising those who had any poetry in their nature, she did not always agree very well with Erica. The two loved each other sincerely, and were far too loyal both to clan and creed to allow their differences really to separate them; but there was, undoubtedly, something in their natures which jarred. Even Tom found it hard at times to bear the strong infusion of bitter criticism which his mother introduced into the home atmosphere. He was something of a philosopher, however, and knowing that she had been through great trouble, and had had

much to try her, he made up his mind that it was natural—therefore inevitable—therefore to be borne.

The home life was not without its frets and petty trials, but on one point there was perfect accord. All were devoted to the head of the house—would have sacrificed anything to bring him a few minutes' peace.

As for Raeburn, when not occupied in actual conflict, he lived in a sort of serene atmosphere of thought and study, far removed from all the small differences and little cares of his household. They invariably smoothed down all such roughnesses in his presence, and probably in any case he would have been unable to see such microscopic grievances; unless, indeed, they left any shade of annoyance on Erica's face, and then his fatherhood detected at once what was wrong.

It would be tedious, however, to follow the course of Erica's life for the next three years, for, though the time was that of her chief mental growth, her days were of the quietest. Not till she was two and twenty did she fully re-

cover from the effects of her sudden sorrow and the subsequent overwork. In the meantime, her father's influence steadily deepened and spread throughout the country, and troubles multiplied.

CHAPTER XVI.

HYDE PARK.

> Who spouts his message to the wilderness,
> Lightens his soul and feels one burden less;
> But to the people preach, and you will find
> They'll pay you back with thanks ill to your mind.
> GOETHE. Translated by J. S. B.

HYDE PARK is a truly national property, and it is amusing and perhaps edifying to note the various uses to which it is often put. In the morning it is the *rendezvous* of nurses and children; in the afternoon of a fashionable throng; on Sunday evenings it is the resort of hard-working men and women, who have to content themselves with getting a breath of fresh air once a week. But, above all, the park is the meeting-place of the people, the place for mass meetings and monster demonstrations.

On a bright day in June, when the trees were still in their freshest green, the crowd of wealth and fashion had beaten an ignominious retreat before a great political demonstration to be held that afternoon.

Everyone knew that the meeting would be a very stormy one, for it related to the most burning question of the day, a question which was hourly growing more and more momentous, and which for the time had divided England into two bitterly opposed factions.

These years which Erica had passed so quietly had been eventful years for the country, years of strife and bloodshed, years of reckless expenditure, years which deluded some and enraged others, provoking most bitter animosity between the opposing parties. The question was not a class question, and a certain number of the working classes and a large number of the London roughs warmly espoused the cause of that party which appealed to their love of power and to a selfish patriotism. The Hyde Park meeting would inevitably be a turbulent one. Those who wished to run no risk remain-

ed at home; Rotten Row was deserted; the carriage road almost empty; while from the gateway there poured in a never-ending stream of people—some serious-looking, some eager and excited, some with a dangerously vindictive look, some merely curious. Every now and then the more motley and disorderly crowd was reinforced by a club with its brass band and banners, and gradually the mass of human beings grew from hundreds to a thousand, from one thousand to many thousands, until, indeed, it became almost impossible to form any idea of the actual numbers, so enormous was the gathering.

'We shall have a bad time of it to-day,' remarked Raeburn to Brian, as they forced their way on. 'If I'm not very much mistaken, too, we are vastly outnumbered.'

He looked round the huge assembly from his vantage ground of six foot four, his cool intrepidity not one whit shaken by the knowledge that, by what he was about to say, he should draw down on his own head all the wrath of the roughest portion of the crowd.

'Twill be against fearful odds!' said Tom, elbowing vigorously to keep up with his companion.

'We fear nae foe!' said Raeburn, quoting his favourite motto. 'And, after all, it were no bad end to die protesting against wicked rapacity, needless bloodshed.'

His eye kindled as he thought of the protest he hoped to make; his heart beat high as he looked round upon the throng so largely composed of those hostile to himself. Was there not a demand for his superabundant energy? a demand for the tremendous powers of endurance, of influence, of devotion which were stored up within him? As an athlete joys in trying a difficult feat, as an artist joys in attempting a lofty subject, so Raeburn, in his consciousness of power, in his absolute conviction of truth, joyed in the prospect of a most dangerous conflict.

Brian, watching him presently from a little distance, could not wonder at the immense influence he had gained in the country. The mere physique of the man was wonderfully impressive

—the strong, rugged Scottish face, the latent power conveyed in his whole bearing. He was no demagogue, he never flattered the people; he preached indeed a somewhat severe creed, but, even in his sternest mood, the hold he got over the people, the power he had of raising the most degraded to a higher level, was simply marvellous. It was not likely, however, that his protest of to-day would lead to anything but a free fight. If he could make himself effectually heard, he cared very little for what followed. It was necessary that a protest should be made, and he was the right man to make it; therefore, come ill or well, he would go through with it, and, if he escaped with his life,—so much the better!

The meeting began. A moderate speaker was heard without interruption, but, the instant Raeburn stood up, a chorus of yells arose. For several minutes he made no attempt to speak; but his dignity seemed to grow in proportion with the indignities offered him. He stood there towering above the crowd like a rock of strength, scanning the thousands of faces with

the steady gaze of one who in thinking of the progress of the race has lost all consciousness of his own personality. He had come there to protest against injustice, to use his vast strength for others, to spend and be spent for millions, to die if need be! Raeburn was made of the stuff of which martyrs are made; standing there face to face with an angry crowd, which might at any moment break loose and trample him to death or tear him in pieces, his heart was nevertheless all aglow with the righteousness of his cause, with the burning desire to make an availing protest against an evil which was desolating thousands of homes.

The majesty of his calmness began to influence the mob; the hisses and groans died away into silence, such comparative silence, that is, as was compatible with the greatness of the assembly. Then Raeburn braced himself up; dignified before, he now seemed even more erect and stately. The knowledge that for the moment he had that huge crowd entirely under control was stimulating in the highest degree. In a minute his stentorian voice was ringing out

fearlessly into the vast arena; thousands of hearts were vibrating to his impassioned appeal. To each one it seemed as if he individually were addressed.

'You who call yourselves Englishmen, I come to appeal to you to-day! You who call yourselves freeman, I come to tell you that you are acting like slaves.'

Then with rare tact he alluded to the strongest points of the British character, touching with consummate skill the vulnerable parts of his audience. He took for granted that their aims were pure, their standard lofty, and by the very supposition raised for the time the most abject of his hearers, inspired them with his own enthusiasm.

Presently when he felt secure enough to venture it, when the crowd was absolutely hanging on his words with breathless attention, he appealed no longer directly to the people, but drew, in graphic language, the picture of the desolations brought by war. The simplicity of his phrases, his entire absence of showiness or bombast, made his influence indescribably deep and

powerful. A mere ranter, a frothy mob orator, would have been silenced long before.

But this man had somehow got hold of the great assembly, had conquered them by sheer force of will: in a battle of one will against thousands the one had conquered, and would hold its own till it had administered the hard home-thrust which would make the thousands wince and retaliate.

Now under the power of that 'sledge-hammer Saxon,' that marvellously graphic picture of misery and bereavement, hard-headed, and hitherto hard-hearted men were crying like children. Then came the rugged, unvarnished statement shouted forth in the speaker's sternest voice.

'All this is being done in your name, men of England! not only in your name, but at your cost! You are responsible for this bloodshed, this misery! How long is it to go on? How long are you free men going to allow yourselves to be bloody executioners? How long are you to be slavish followers of that grasping ambition which veils its foulness under the fair name of patriotism?'

Loud murmurs began to arise at this, and the orator knew that the ground-swell betokened the coming storm. He proceeded with tenfold energy, his words came down like hailstones, with a fiery indignation he delivered his mighty philippic, in a torrent of forceful words he launched out the most tremendous denunciation he had ever uttered.

The string had been gradually worked up to its highest possible tension; at length when the strain was the greatest it suddenly snapped. Raeburn's will had held all those thousands in check; he had kept his bitterest enemies hanging on his words; he had lashed them into fury, and still kept his grip over them; he had worked them up, gaining more and more power over them, till at length, as he shouted forth the last words of a grand peroration, the bitterness and truth of his accusations proved keener than his restraining influence.

He had foreseen that the spell would break, he knew the instant it was broken. A moment before, and he had been able to sway that huge crowd as he pleased; now he was

at their mercy. No will-power, no force of language, no strength of earnestness or truth would avail him now. All that he had to trust to was his immense physical strength, and what was that when measured against thousands!

He saw the dangerous surging movement in the sea of heads, and knew only too well what it betokened. With a frightful yell of mingled hatred and execration, the seething human mass bore down upon him! His own followers and friends did what they could for him, but that was very little. His case was desperate. Desperation, however, inspires some people with an almost superhuman energy. Life was sweet, and that day he fought for his life. The very shouting and hooting of the mob, the roar of the angry multitude, which might well have filled even a brave man with panic, stimulated him, strengthened him to resist to the uttermost.

He fought like a lion, forcing his way through the furious crowd, attacked in the most brutal way on every side, yet ever struggling on if only by inches. Never once did

his steadfastness waver, never for a single instant did his spirit sink. His unfailing presence of mind enabled him to get through what would have been impossible to most men, his great height and strength stood him in good stead, while the meanness and the injustice of the attack, the immense odds against which he was fighting, nerved him for the struggle.

It was more like a hideous nightmare than a piece of actual life, those fierce tiger faces swarming around, that roar of vindictive anger, that frightful crushing, that hail-storm of savage blows! But, whether life or nightmare, it must be gone through with. In the thick of the fight a line of Goethe came to his mind, one of his favourite mottos,—'Make good thy standing-place and move the world.'

And even then he half-smiled to himself at the forlornness of the hope that he should ever need a standing-place again.

With renewed vigour he fought his way on, and with a sort of glow of triumph and newborn hope had almost seen his way to a place of comparative safety, when a fearful blow hope-

lessly maimed him. With a vain struggle to save himself he fell to the earth,—a vision of fierce faces, green leaves, and blue sky flashed before his eyes, an inward vision of Erica, a moment's agony, and then the surging crowd closed over him, and he knew no more.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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